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CATHARSIS AND EMOTION IN FICTION

by

(C) ALEXANDER NEILL

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Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.

Virgil, *Aeneid*, i. 203.

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled CATHARSIS AND EMOTION IN FICTION submitted by ALEXANDER NEILL in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I outline a theory of catharsis which is designed to avoid violating the constraints imposed by a Wittgensteinian theory of emotion, whilst at the same time capturing traditional intuitions concerning the nature of our response to fiction. In Chapter I, I identify a problem concerning catharsis which arises in Kendall Walton's theory of fiction. In Chapter II, I discuss traditional purgation theories of catharsis, with a view to establishing what precisely is involved in such theories, and whether they necessarily violate the constraints imposed by the Wittgensteinian theory of emotion accepted by Walton. Concluding that they do violate these constraints, I turn in Chapter III to a consideration of Leon Golden's clarification theory of catharsis, which suggests that the concept denotes an intellectual process rather than any emotional experience. In Chapter IV, I give an account of what this process might involve, based on Wittgenstein's notion that we learn the meanings of concepts by seeing them in use in particular contexts. In Chapter V, I argue that added support is given to this account of how it is that we learn from fiction by a consideration of Stanley Cavell's concept of acknowledgment. I then argue that this notion also allows us to understand how it is that we can have genuine emotions the objects of which are fictional.

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I. Catharsis and Emotion

> It is chiefly by fictionally facing certain situations, engaging in certain activities, and having or expressing certain feelings, I think, that a dreamer, fantasizer, or game player comes to terms with his actual feelings -- that he discovers them, learns to accept them, purges himself of them, or whatever exactly it is that he does. [1]

The idea that in responding to fiction a person goes through some sort of process which enables him to "come to terms with", "discover", "learn to accept", or "purge himself of" his emotions has for centuries played a major role in theories of literature. This process has commonly been referred to as *catharsis*, a term originally derived from Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; *through pity and fear effecting the proper [catharsis] of these emotions.* [2]

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[1] Kendall Walton, "Fearing Fictions", *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXV, 1, 1978; p.24.

[2] S.H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, (4th ed.; Dover Publications, 1951). My italics. Butcher translates *catharsis* as "purgation" here. I shall discuss purgation and purification theories of catharsis in my next chapter; for reasons which will become obvious I prefer to leave the question of how emotion is involved in catharsis open for the present.

Since the appearance of the first commentary on the *Poetics*, Robortello's *In Librium Aristotelis de Arto Poetica Explicationes*[3], the concept of catharsis has been under continual discussion by literary critics, poets, classicists and philosophers alike.

Although this discussion has not resulted in any one universally accepted interpretation of the cathartic process or effect, scholars have generally agreed on two points. The first concerns the importance of the role played by the concept in theories of literature and aesthetic response. For example, many Aristotelian scholars have noted that although catharsis appears only once as a technical term in the *Poetics*[4], its position in the definition of tragedy indicates that Aristotle thought of it as being the end ("telos") or purpose ("ergon") of tragedy. Sir David Ross, for example, notes that: "To be complete, [the definition] must mention the final cause of tragedy, and this Aristotle does by naming purgation as its aim"[5].

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[3] Published in Florence in 1548. For an account of early criticism of the *Poetics*, see B. Weinberg's *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, (Chicago, 1961), and J.E. Spingarn's *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, (Harbinger Books ed., New York, 1963). A somewhat patchy survey of the history of interpretations and criticism of the "catharsis clause" of Aristotle's definition is given in Chapter III of K.G. Srivastava's *Aristotle's Doctrine of Tragic Catharsis: A Critical Survey*, (Allahabad, 1982).

[4] The word does occur once more in Chapter XVII (1455b), to describe the deliverence of Orestes in Euripides' *Iphigenia* "by means of the purificatory rite". (See Butcher, p.63).

[5] Sir David Ross, *Aristotle*, (5th ed., reprinted, London, 1953) p.282. F.L. Lucas, in his *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's* **Poetics**, (London, 1928), also suggests that the catharsis clause of the definition gives us the function that tragedy fulfils; see pp.13-14. Butcher calls his

The concept of catharsis also plays an important, if obscure, role in Kendall Walton's theory of fiction; its importance there is indicated by the fact that it is introduced in "Fearing Fictions" as a substantial part of Walton's tentative answer to

> the fundamental question of why and how fiction is important. Why don't we dismiss novels, plays, and films as "mere fiction" and hence unworthy of serious attention? [4]

Walton's theory turns on the idea that our response to certain forms of art should be understood in terms of playing games of "make-believe"[5]. Such games, he notes, are also used in education and in certain forms of psychotherapy; he characterises their "value and importance" in these contexts in terms of their cathartic effect:

> such activities serve to clarify one's feelings, help one to work out conflicts, provide an outlet for the expression of repressed or socially unacceptable feelings, prepare one emotionally for possible future crises by providing "practice" in facing imaginary crises. [6]

Since our response to art also involves playing games of "make-believe", he says, "It is natural to presume that our

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[3](cont'd) chapter on catharsis "The Function of Tragedy". See also Leon Golden, "Catharsis", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, XCIII, 1962. The only major commentator who disagrees with this view is G.F. Else, in *Aristotle's* **Poetics**: *The Argument*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1957).

[4] Walton, "Fearing Fictions", p.24.

[5] Walton's theory of fictional response is given in "Fearing Fictions" and in "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXXVII, 1, 1978. His account of representation and fictional truth, on which the theory is based, is given in "Pictures and Make-Believe", *Philosophical Review*, 82, 1973. A more detailed account of Walton's theory will be given later in this chapter.

[6] "Fearing Fictions", p.24.

experience of representational works of art is valuable for similar reasons"[9]. Although he does not use the term explicitly, his suggestion here is clearly that the "value and importance" of fiction lies in the fact that it can have a cathartic effect on us. This suggestion is reiterated later in the same paper, when he argues that his theory accounts for the way in which "works last as well as they do, how they survive multiple readings or viewings without losing their effectiveness". His explanation is that each reading of a work can be a different game of make-believe, in which the "prop", (the work in question), is used differently. However, even if we accept Walton's theory of make-believe, this is not wholly convincing. It seems clear that we do not necessarily play a different "game" every time we re-read a novel or see again a familiar play or film. Walton concedes this, and in doing so provides perhaps the clearest indication that some notion of catharsis plays an important role in his theory:

> even if the game is much the same from reading to reading, *one's emotional needs may require the therapy* of several or many repetitions. [10]

According to Walton's theory, then, the "value and importance" of fiction lies in the fact that it provides "emotional therapy", and "an outlet for the expression of repressed or socially unacceptable feelings". Although catharsis is not mentioned explicitly in "Fearing Fictions", I suggest that statements such as that in responding to a

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[9] *ibid.*
[10] "Fearing Fictions", p.27; my italics.

work of fiction a person "comes to terms with his actual feelings... discovers them, learns to accept them, purges himself of them..." indicate that whatever the precise nature of the process Walton has in mind (and he never states this), it bears a close resemblance to traditional notions of catharsis.

The second point on which scholars interested in catharsis have generally agreed is that the cathartic process in some way involves our emotions or feelings. As the quotation above indicates, Kendall Walton is vague about the precise nature of this involvement, although it is clear that he thinks that the cathartic process he outlines has some effect on our emotional stability. Aristotle's position, on the other hand, appears to be (at least on the surface) much clearer. It is characterised by S.H. Butcher, one of the most respected commentators on the *Poetics*, as follows:

> [The work] excites the emotions of pity and fear -- kindred emotions that are in the breasts of all men -- and by the act of excitation affords a pleasurable relief. The feelings called forth by the tragic spectacle are not indeed permanently removed, but are quieted for the time, so that the system can fall back upon its normal course. The stage, in fact, provides a harmless and pleasurable outlet for instincts which demand satisfaction, and which can be indulged here more fearlessly than in real life.''

Milton describes the cathartic process as involving:

> raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those

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'' Butcher, p.245.

passions well imitated. '[12]

Implicit in traditional notions of catharsis, then, is the view that fictions do, or at any rate can, arouse genuine emotions in us. Together with the notion of catharsis itself, this view has played a central part in our understanding of literature and of the arts in general through history. Plato condemned poetry on the grounds that it "waters the growth of passions", whilst Aristotle stated:

> [T]he plot [of a tragedy] must be structured... that the one who is hearing the events unroll shudders with fear and feels pity at what happens: which is what one would experience on hearing the plot of the Oedipus. '[13]

Walton says:

> We respond to what we know about fictional worlds in many of the ways that we respond to what we know about the real world -- or at least it seems that we do. When we learn that Tom Sawyer and Becky are lost in a cave we worry about whether they will find their way out. We sympathise with the plight of Willy Loman. We are terrified of the Frankenstein monster. Fictional characters cause real people to shed tears, lose sleep, laugh, and scream. '[14]

The intuition that art can (and according to some should) arouse emotion in its audience has of course also been a central element in expressionist theories of art'[15].

Considered in the light of a commonly held view of the nature of emotion, however, it is apparent that this intuition, and thus the notion of catharsis, presents a

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'[12] Introduction to *Samson Agonistes*, (O.U.P. ed.; Oxford, 1960).
'[13] *Poetics*, Chapter 14.
'[14] Walton, "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", p.12.
'[15] See, for example, John Hospers, "The Concept of Artistic Expression", reprinted in *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics*, (New York, 1969), pp.142-166.

puzzle for philosophers interested in the nature of fiction. This view of emotion can be seen as having arisen from a dissatisfaction with what Errol Bedford and George Pitcher have characterised as the "traditional" theory of the nature of the emotions''.

> According to [the traditional] view an emotion is a feeling, or at least an experience of a special type which involves a feeling. Logically, this amounts to regarding emotion words as the names of feelings. ''

Briefly, we can distinguish three major objections that have commonly been made against this "traditional" theory. Firstly, it is argued that there is no reason to suppose that there is a range of distinguishable feelings such that each of our emotion words corresponds to a different feeling. Bedford, for instance, notes that there may be no perceptible difference between the feelings that accompany annoyance and those that accompany indignation, and yet annoyance and indignation clearly are different emotions. Furthermore, it is argued, we cannot identify and distinguish between emotions simply by reference to feelings. Secondly, as Pitcher notes, emotions often, if not always, have objects -- I am angry *at* something, afraid *of* something, and so on. Feelings need not have objects, however; indeed, it has been argued that it is precisely this that distinguishes emotions from feelings. Thirdly, it has been noted that it is a characteristic of emotions that

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'' See George Pitcher, "Emotion", *Mind*, LXXIV, 295, 1965; and Errol Bedford, "Emotions", reprinted in *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*, ed. Donald F. Gustafson, (New York, 1964).

'' Bedford, p.77.

they can be reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified, and so on. This is not a characteristic of feelings, however; and this has been taken as another indication that emotion words cannot simply be the names of feelings'[1].

The alternative view of the nature of emotions, presented by Pitcher and Bedford among others, has a strongly Wittgensteinian flavour, largely in that it asserts the *public* nature of emotions. Bedford says, for instance:

> For the moment, I only want to suggest that the traditional answer to the question "How do we identify our own emotions?" namely, "By introspection", cannot be correct. It seems to me that there is every reason to believe that we learn about our own emotions essentially in the same way as other people learn about them. '[2]

Bedford's point here, I think, is similar to that being made by Wittgenstein in his discussion of the criteria we use to identify pain[2]. Essentially, his argument there is that for the language of mental experience to function, our concepts of mental experience must be governed by public criteria. There could be no possibility of objective meaning, of objective justification for the application of terms, if those terms simply function as names of objects that are necessarily private. Thus emotion words cannot simply be the names of feelings; the criteria we use for identifying and distinguishing between emotions are non-psychological.

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[1] Bedford pushes this view to its extreme, arguing that having an emotion is logically independent of having a feeling. (p.80).
[2] Bedford, p.81.
[2] See his *Philosophical Investigations*, sec.246 ff.

Futhermore, it is argued that the criteria for identifying an emotion cannot be simply behavioral. Emotion words carry implications not simply concerning an individual's behavior, but also about the social context in which that behavior is meaningful. Bedford suggests, for instance, that the behavior of someone who is ashamed may not noticeably differ from that of someone who is embarrassed. Which emotion we ascribe to them will depend on the social situation that they are in. He cites as an example the case of Peter Davies, who was reported to be "to his mild embarrassment" the model for Peter Pan[21]. The epithet "embarrassment" here is appropriate; "shame", on the other hand, would not be, since Davis is not responsible for being the model, and since there is nothing reprehensible about it. Our error in calling him ashamed would be logical; it has nothing to do with his behavior or feelings. Similarly, we can only claim that A is jealous of B if certain conditions with respect to their relationship obtain; if these conditions are absent, it would simply be wrong to ascribe jealousy to A. Once again, our error in such a case would be *logical*, rather than a matter of bad psychology.

> Emotion concepts... are not purely psychological: they presuppose concepts of social relationships and institutions, and concepts belonging to systems of judgment, moral, aesthetic, and legal. In using emotion words we are able, therefore, to relate behavior to the complex background in which it is enacted, and so to make human actions intelligible.[22]

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[21] See Bedford, pp.85-86.
[22] Bedford, p.98.

According to this view emotions are seen as being *conceptually* linked to beliefs, (and,on some versions of the view, to desires and actions.)

> For each emotion there seem to be certain characteristic beliefs that the subject must have about the object of his emotion. With many, if not all, emotions he must have a belief in the existence... of the object. He must also see the object as having certain properties. [23]

If, for instance, a person is afraid of a burglar, we would expect him firstly to believe either that there is a burglar or that there might well be one (Pitcher calls this the "General" belief or apprehension); and secondly to believe that the presence of the burglar puts him in some danger (Pitcher calls this the "Specificatory" belief or apprehension.) A person who can correctly be called "afraid", that is, must believe that the object of his fear exists, and must also hold certain beliefs about the properties of that object. Further, it is sometimes claimed that emotion is conceptually linked to action[24]: a person who is afraid of a burglar will attempt to escape, or to defend himself, or at least will have an inclination towards such an action. (Of course, the range of possible actions and levels of inclination towards them linked with a particular emotion may well be very extensive.) In the various accounts of this view of the nature of the emotions the emphasis placed on the role of action and desire tends

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[23] Keith Donellan, "Causes, Objects, and Producers of the Emotions" (abstract), *Journal of Philosophy*, LXVII, 21, 1970; p.949.

[24] For instance by Walton ("Fearing Fictions", pp.6-9), and by Pitcher (p.333).

to differ; however, it appears to be generally accepted that the presence of beliefs on the part of the individual experiencing the emotion is a necessary condition for the ascription and identification of emotion. As Walton says:

> It seems a principle of common sense, one which ought not to be abandoned if there is any reasonable alternative, that fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger. [25]

It is clear that on this view of the nature of emotions, the intuition that we are, or can be, genuinely moved by fictions presents a problem. To use Walton's examples, we intuitively feel that we *do* detest Iago, fear for Tom Sawyer and Becky lost in the cave, pity Willy Loman, envy Superman, and so on. At the same time, however, we know full well (and hence believe) that these characters are *fictional*, that they do not exist, (or, at any rate, that they do not exist in the way that *we* do.) Thus it seems that Pitcher's first necessary condition for the ascription and identification of emotion, namely the "General" belief concerning the existence of the object of the emotion, is violated. Furthermore, if we do not believe that the object of the emotion exists, we cannot satisfy Pitcher's second condition, that of having "Specificatory" beliefs about it. When Charles says he is frightened by the green slime in the horror movie, he does not believe that it exists, and therefore cannot believe that he is in any danger from it. If we accept the theory of the nature of emotion outlined above, we seem to be left with the conclusion that the

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[25] "Fearing Fictions", pp.6-7.

intuition that we can be genuinely moved by fiction is simply mistaken; appearances aside, it is simply not *logically* possible that one can have emotions whose objects are fictional. Whatever Charles may think or feel, it is not the case that he is *afraid* of the green slime. This conclusion is accepted by Walton at the beginning of "Fearing Fictions":

> ...I am sceptical. We do indeed get "caught up" in stories; we often become "emotionally involved" when we read novels or watch plays or films. But to construe this involvement as consisting of our having psychological attitudes towards fictional entities is, I think, to tolerate mystery and court confusion. [24]

This conclusion is unlikely to impress Charles, however, for it seems simply to fly in the face of the facts. As Walton says: "We do indeed get 'caught up' in stories; we often become 'emotionally involved' when we read novels or watch plays or films". Furthermore, as we have seen, the fact that we do become "emotionally involved" with fictions is at the heart of traditional theories of catharsis. If we abandon the intuition that fiction can arouse or evoke emotion in us, then, not only do we deny what seems to be a brute fact, but it appears that we shall be forced to dismiss the concept of catharsis as an unworkable notion based on a mistaken understanding of the nature of emotion.

Some philosophers have argued that the fact that we *are* moved by fictions indicates that the theory of emotion

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[24] "Fearing Fictions", p.6.

outlined above is at best incomplete, and at worst simply wrong[27]. Like Walton, I shall give no arguments for accepting the theory of emotions, beyond asserting that it does seem to reflect "common sense". Rather than abandoning the theory, it would be preferable if we could give an account of the fact that we do seem to get emotionally involved with fiction, and of the concept of catharsis, which does not violate the constraints imposed by it.

Walton prefaces his paper "Fearing Fictions" with a quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics* concerning the power of fiction to arouse emotion in us[28]. This indicates that he takes this intuition to be something that needs to be unpacked or explained; indeed, Walton's theory of fiction as a whole might be characterised as an attempt to explain or account for the intuition that we are moved by fictions, without violating the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined above. Essentially, his point is that when we are "moved" by fiction, rather than experiencing genuine emotions, we experience "quasi-emotions". It will be useful to have a brief account of his theory here. Walton argues that propositions that are "true in the world of a novel" (or in a "fictional world") are *fictional* propositions[29]. When a person says "Robinson Crusoe survived a shipwreck", he is to be understood as asserting that it is *fictional*

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[27] See, for instance, Michael Weston, "How Can We Be Moved By The Fate Of Anna Karenina?", *Proc. Aris. Soc.*, supp.vol. 49, (1975); and H.O. Mounce, "Art and Real Life", *Philosophy*, 55, (1980).

[28] See above, p.6.

[29] "Fearing Fictions", p.10.

that Crusoe survived a shipwreck. To make such a statement is not to attribute properties to Crusoe, nor indeed to refer to him at all; rather, it characterises the proposition itself as being of a certain kind. The operator "It is fictional that..." is to be understood as analogous to operators such as "It is believed/denied/wished/claimed that..."; these operators do not attribute truth to a proposition. "It is fictional that..." attributes the property of fictionality to a proposition[30]. A *fictional truth* is the fact that "it is fictional that *p*". A *fictional world* is a collection of fictional truths, and these truths are true relative to that particular fictional world.

Walton distinguishes between imaginary fictional truths and make-believe fictional truths[31]. If it is fictional that Jones is Emperor of China just because Jones imagines himself to be so, this is an imaginary fictional truth. It should be noticed here that Jones, in his fantasy, might deliberate whether to be Emperor of China or of Japan. It may be the case that this deliberation involves him in imagining being both. What makes it an imaginary fictional truth relative to his fantasy that he is Emperor of China is his *decision* that this should be so. Make-believe fictional truths are those which are true in virtue of something more than my imagining them to be so (although part of what makes them true might be the fact that someone imagines them to be

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[30] "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", p.15.

[31] "Fearing Fictions", p.11; "Pictures and Make-Believe", pp.287-292.

so.) For instance, whilst playing a game of mud-pies, children might agree that whenever a glob of mud is in a certain box, it will be fictionally true that a pie is in the oven. This is a make-believe fictional truth; my imagining that the box is a fridge will not make it fictionally true (relative to *this* game) that there is a pie in the fridge when there is a glob of mud in the box. We should notice here that make-believe truths, unlike imaginary truths, enjoy independence from what people *take* to be true. If it is a rule of the game of make-believe that the sizes of pies are equivalent to the sizes of the globs of mud, and if Sally's glob of mud is bigger than Johnny's, then it is make-believedly true that Sally's pie is bigger than Johnny's pie, no matter whether anyone has noticed the fact. We can be ignorant of or mistaken about make-believe truths as easily as we can be about the literal truths on which they depend.

Works of art generate make-believe fictional truths: for instance, the novel *Robinson Crusoe* generates the fictional truths that Crusoe survived a shipwreck, that he had a friend named Friday, and so on. Games of make-believe can generate both imaginary and make-believe fictional truths. Walton argues that in responding to works of fiction we enter into a game of make-believe in which the work is used as a prop[32]. This game of make-believe constitutes a "world" in which both we and the characters of the work

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[32] "Fearing Fictions", p.13.

reside; thus in responding to a work, entering into a game of make-believe, *we become fictional*. When I say "Crusoe survived a shipwreck", I do so from within the game of make-believe relative to which "Crusoe survived a shipwreck" is a make-believe truth. Rather than asserting the proposition, I pretend to (or make-believedly) assert it; I make it make-believedly true of myself, relative to the world in which both Crusoe and I reside, that I am asserting it.

> Tom Sawyer and Willy Loman are neither real nor believed to be. Instead, appreciators are fictional. Rather than somehow promoting fictions to the level of reality, we, as appreciators, descend to the level of fictions. [33]

Walton argues that when Charles watches the horror movie, he is playing a game of make-believe in which he uses the images on the screen as props:

> Charles believes (he knows) that make-believedly the green slime is bearing down on him and he is in danger of being destroyed by it. His quasi-fear results from this belief. What makes it make-believe that Charles is afraid rather than angry or excited or upset is the fact that his quasi-fear is caused by the belief that make-believedly he is in danger. And his belief that make-believedly it is the slime that endangers him is what makes it make-believe that the slime is the object of his fear... [T]he fact that Charles is quasi-afraid as a result of realising that make-believedly the slime threatens him generates the truth that make-believedly he is afraid of the slime. [34]

The proposition "Charles is afraid of the green slime", then, is make-believedly true relative to the world in which both Charles and the slime reside.

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[33] "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", p.21.

[34] "Fearing Fictions", p.14.

Walton's account of fictional language asserts that fictional characters neither exist nor have properties. Thus we can see that his theory is consistent with the theory of emotions outlined earlier in this chapter. Fictional characters cannot be the objects of emotion, because the relevant belief conditions for having an emotion cannot be met. Whatever "quasi-fear" is for Walton, it cannot be real fear.

Walton's theory, then, can be characterised as an attempt to defend the theory of emotion outlined above against the charge that the common intuition that we can, and do, have emotions whose objects are fictional demonstrates the inadequacy of that theory. Walton's defense consists in giving an explanation of that intuition in terms of our playing games of make-believe and thus "descending to the level of fiction". My concern in this thesis is not with the adequacy of Walton's theory of fictional response as a whole; however, an apparent inconsistency in his account illustrates the problem that I do wish to discuss. As we have seen, Walton claims that the value and importance of fiction lies in the fact that it "provides an outlet for the expression of repressed or socially unacceptable feelings", a chance to "come to terms with", "discover", or "purge" ourselves of our *actual* feelings. In short, fiction, according to Walton, provides us with "emotional therapy". At the same time, however, he holds (consistent with the theory of emotion outlined above) that fictions do not

arouse genuine emotions in us.

My aim in this thesis is to give an account of the cathartic process sketched by Walton, an account which will capture traditional intuitions concerning both the nature of catharsis and our emotional response to fiction without violating the constraints imposed by what I, like Walton, take to be an acceptable theory of emotion. If such an account can be given, it will have the following advantages. Firstly, it will resolve the apparent inconsistency in Walton's theory. Secondly, it will go beyond Walton's vague outline, and contribute more to our understanding of what he refers to as the importance and value of fiction. Thirdly, it will provide us with a way of understanding a concept which has historically played a crucial role in theories of literature and fictional response, but which appears as it stands to be seriously threatened by a modern theory of emotion.

II. The Purgation Theory of Catharsis

> If any spirit breathes within this round,
> Uncapable of weighty passion
> (As from his birth being hugged in the arms,
> And nuzzled 'twixt the breasts of happiness),
> Who winks and shuts his apprehension up
> From common sense of what men were and are,
> Who would not know what men must be -- let such
> Hurry amain from our black-visaged shows:
> We shall affright their eyes. But if a breast
> Nail'd to the earth with grief, if any heart
> Pierc'd through with anguish pant within this ring;
> If there be any blood whose heat is choked
> And stifled with true sense of misery;
> If ought of these strains fill this consort up -
> Th' arrive most welcome. [33]

The great majority of the views of catharsis that have been offered over the centuries can be considered as variants of what I shall call the "purgation" theory. In 1957, when Gerald Else published his enormously influential commentary on the *Poetics*, he was able to say (of Bernays' version of the theory) that it "has dominated most thinking on catharsis since its publication, and still remains, with minor variations in detail, what one might call the vulgate"[34]. In the first part of this chapter I shall give a historical account of the theory, with a view to establishing precisely what it involves. We will then be in

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[33] Marston, Prologue to *Antonio's Revenge*.
[34] G.F. Else, *Aristotle's* **Poetics**: *The Argument*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1957) p.225.

a position to see whether it necessarily violates the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I.

Our first task here will be to consider some of the "minor variations in detail" that Else refers to. We can distinguish two major elements within the purgation theory of catharsis; the distinction between these two rests on a debate as to whether the word catharsis is used by Aristotle in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics* as a *medical* metaphor, (the view championed by Bernays), or as a *religious* metaphor, (the view defended most notably by Lessing[37].) It should be noted here that my classifying both views as elements of the purgation theory is at odds with the way in which the view has been presented in the literature; traditionally, the debate has been presented as one between the "purgation" theory and the "purification" theory. However, it will be apparent from what follows that I consider this traditional distinction to be far too broad, and an added source of confusion in an already confused debate.

The most influential proponent of the view that catharsis is used as a medical metaphor has been Jacob Bernays[38]. According to Bernays, the term catharsis denotes

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[37] In *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, (Hamburg, 1767); translated by V. Lange as *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, (New York, 1962).

[38] In "Grundzuge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles uber Wirkung der Tragodie", (1857); reprinted in *Zwei Abhandlungen uber die Aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, (Berlin, 1880). Bernays' interpretation, though extremely influential, was by no means original. Many Renaissance critics held similar views about the meaning of catharsis,

pathological effect on the soul analogous to the effect of an aperient on the body. This view is based upon the use of the word as a technical term in the medical writings of Hippocrates of Cos, and of Galen. Butcher notes:

> In the medical language of the school of Hippocrates [catharsis] strictly denotes the removal of a painful or disturbing element from the organism, and hence the purifying of what remains, by the elimination of alien matter. [39]

Hippocratic medical theory was based on the idea that the human body contains four "vital fluids", or "humours": blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. It was thought that good health depends on these humours being kept in proper proportion to one another; disease is the result of the excess or deficiency of one or more of the humours. The more disordered the humours are, then, the worse the disease is; and if one or more of the humours is allowed to accumulate in excess in the body it will become "morbid" or "corrupt". According to this theory, the task of the physician is to expell the excess of the humour in question from the system before it becomes morbid; this he does through the use of purgatives or aperients, a homeopathic process, leaving the humours in their correct balance or proportion. This process of purging, or "cleansing" the body of poisonous matter, is denoted by the term "catharsis"[40].

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[38](cont'd) and Bernays was almost directly anticipated by Henri Weil, in "Ueber die Wirkung der Tragodie nach Aristoteles", reprinted in *Verhandlungen der zehnten Versammlung deutscher Philologen in Basel*, (Basel, 1848).

[39] Butcher, p.253.

[40] See Butcher, p.253 note 1, and Srivastava, pp.37-39. Perhaps the best account of the "medical" interpretation of catharsis is given by R.D. Hicks and F. Susemihl, *The*

Advocates of the view that catharsis is used by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as a medical metaphor have commonly turned to a passage in the *Politics* which, it is argued, gives weight to their theory:

> We accept the division of melodies proposed by certain philosophers into ethical melodies, melodies of action, and passionate or inspiring melodies, each having, as they say, mode corresponding to it. But we maintain further that music should be studied, not for the sake of one, but of many benefits, that is to say, with a view to (i)education, (ii)catharsis, ("catharsis" we use at present without explanation, but when hereafter we speak of poetry, we will treat the subject with more precision); music may also serve (iii)for intellectual enjoyment, for relaxation, and for recreation after exertion. It is clear, therefore, that all the modes must be employed by us, but not all of them in the same manner. In education, the most ethical modes are to be preferred but in listening to the performance of others we may admit the modes of action and passion also. For feelings, such as pity and fear, or, again, enthusiasm, exist very strongly in some souls, and have more or less influence over all. Some persons fall into a religious frenzy, whom we see as a result of the sacred melodies -- when they have used the melodies that excite the soul to mystic frenzy -- restored as though they had found healing and purgation. Those who are influenced by pity and fear, and every emotional nature, must have a like experience, and others in so far as each is susceptible to such emotions, and all are in a manner purged and their souls lightened and delightened. The purgative melodies likewise give an innocent pleasure to mankind.[41]

It is commonly held that Aristotle's promise to explain what he means by catharsis "when hereafter we speak of poetry"

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[40](cont'd) *Politics of Aristotle*, (London, 1894), pp.641-656. See also Ingram Bywater, "Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy", *Journal of Philology*, 27, (1900), pp.267-275.

[41] *Politics*, VIII, vii; translated by B. Jowett. Reprinted in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon, (New York, 1941). At the beginning of the quotation, I have retained "catharsis" where Jowett translates the term as "purgation".

was fulfilled in the lost second book of the *Poetics*. Whether or not that was the case, however, the promised explanation is unavailable to us, and supporters of the medical interpretation have therefore resorted to the passage in the *Politics* as providing the best indication of what catharsis meant in the *Poetics*[42]. As Butcher notes, the catharsis by means of music described in this passage is a homeopathic treatment; "it consisted in applying movement to cure movement, in soothing the internal trouble of the mind by a wild and restless music"[43]. It seems clear, then, that Aristotle uses catharsis in this passage from the *Politics* as a medical metaphor; the question is whether or not the term is used in the same way in the *Poetics*. Commentators following the lead of Bernays claim that it is, and initially, at least, it seems that this interpretation does have some plausibility. Having talked about the effect of

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[42] Some more comfortably than others, it should be noted. Ross, for example, suggests that the *Politics* passage shows us the meaning of catharsis in the *Poetics*, and in *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, (2nd ed., Oxford, 1970), D.J. Allan says:

> In the deficient state of the evidence, one must evidently transfer what is thus said of an emotional purge through music [in the *Politics*] to one which is achieved by the viewing... of tragedy and comedy [as suggested in the *Poetics*]. (p.156).

Other commentators have been more suspicious of this transfer, however. In *Aristotle's Poetics*, (London, 1956), Humphry House notes:

> We are thus forced, paradoxically, to try to use the passage in the *Politics*, which Aristotle himself admitted to be inadequate, as a means of interpreting the even more inadequate passage in the *Poetics*. (p.106).

[43] Butcher, p.248. Many commentators have noticed that Plato gives a similar account of the cathartic "cure" in his *Laws*, VII, 790-1.

"purgative melodies" on those suffering from "religious frenzy", Aristotle comments that "Those who are influenced by pity and fear... must have a like experience...". Thus commentators have argued that the tragic emotions of pity and fear are analogous to the humours of Hippocratic medical theory: if allowed to become too powerful, they can corrupt the mental or emotional health of the individual. Tragedy, then, is analogous to the "cathartic music" of the *Politics*: it excites the emotions of pity and fear, "purges" them, and leaves the individual "cleansed" and restored to "health", "their souls lightened and delighted". F.L. Lucas characterises the position as follows:

> In order to live tolerably we must be able to control the passions that struggle within us; but it will be easier and less harmful to control them when we must, if we give them a harmless outlet when we may. [44]

The proponents of the medical interpretation of catharsis claim that further support for their view is provided by seeing Aristotle's introduction of the concept as a response to part of Plato's notorious attack on art, and in particular poetry. Butcher rather elegantly characterises Plato's view as follows: "Through its tearful moods [poetry] enfeebles the manly temper; it makes anarchy in the soul by exalting the lower elements over the higher, and by dethroning reason in favour of feeling"[45]. The backdrop to this criticism of poetry is to be found in Book IV of the *Republic*. There Plato gives us an account of human

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[44] Lucas, p.25.
[45] Butcher, p.246.

nature according to which the soul is divided into three parts: the rational, the irrational appetitive, and the spirited parts[46]. In the picture Plato gives us, reason is constantly in conflict with the appetites, of which the emotions are an important element. The "good life" consists in the fullest possible exercise of reason, and the subjugation, as far as is possible, of the emotions. Poetry, however, directly *appeals* to the emotions:

> "It waters the growth of passions which should be allowed to wither away and sets them up in control, although the goodness and happiness of our lives depends on their being held in subjection. [47]

How then are we to see Aristotle's introduction of catharsis into his definition of tragedy as a response to Plato's criticisms concerning the power of poetry to arouse emotion? One answer to this is suggested by Ross:

> That tragedy arouses pity and fear is a matter of common knowledge, and was one of the main bases of Plato's attack on it; by stimulating emotion, he said, tragedy makes us more emotional and weak. Aristotle implicitly answers him by saying that the further effect of tragedy is not to make us more emotional but to purge away emotion. [48]

The suggestion here is that Aristotle accepts Plato's premises -- namely, that tragedy arouses emotion, and that our emotions should be subjugated as far as possible -- but denies the conclusion about the end result of tragedy that Plato draws from them. Tragedy may arouse our emotions, it is suggested, but only to expell them from our systems.

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[46] *Republic*, IV, 434D-441C.
[47] *Republic*, X, 606D. (Cornford's translation, Oxford, 1941).
[48] W.D. Ross, p.283. Ross does qualify this statement later in the same chapter.

As it stands, however, this view of the cathartic process cannot be correct. We noted earlier that the claim that Aristotle uses catharsis as a medical metaphor in the *Poetics* is largely based on the common usage of the word as a technical term in medical writings of the time. The central tenet of Hippocratic medical theory was that health depends on the four bodily humours being present in the system in due proportion to each other. The cathartic process involved the expulsion of *excessive* amounts of one or more of the humours, leaving them in their correct balance. Expelling one of the humours completely would be as damaging to the health as allowing it to accumulate in the system and become morbid. If catharsis is used in the *Poetics* as a metaphor based on the technical use of the term in contemporary medical theory, then, it seems implausible that it should mean the complete expulsion of the emotions. Furthermore, if the version of the "purgation" theory that we are considering here was the correct one, it should be possible to demonstrate that Aristotle considered emotion, or at least the emotions of pity and fear, to be an undesirable element in human nature which ought to be expelled. Aristotle clearly did not think this, however. In his discussion of the doctrine of the mean in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, he says:

> By virtue I mean moral virtue since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and these involve excess, deficiency, and a mean. It is possible, for example, to feel fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, and pleasure and pain generally, too much or too litle; and both of these

> are wrong. But to have these feelings at the right times on the right grounds towards the right people for the right motive and in the right way is to feel them to an intermediate, that is to the best, degree; and this the mark of virtue. [49]

Later in the same work, he gives us a specific example:

> Well, we do fear all evils -- e.g. disgrace, poverty, sickness, friendlessness, death -- but not all of these are considered to be the concern of the courageous man, *because there are some of them that it is right and honourable to fear, and shameful not to fear*, e.g. disgrace. The man who is afraid of it is upright and decent, and the man who is not afraid of it is shameless;... [50]

These statements, I suggest, show clearly that Aristotle cannot mean by catharsis the complete expulsion of emotion from the human soul. However, they do indicate that another version of the "purgation" theory of catharsis might be more successful.

As we have seen, both Aristotelian ethics and the theory of medicine in which catharsis is used as a technical term meaning purgation involve a central notion of balance or proportion. From the passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* quoted above, it is clear that Aristotle considered feelings and emotions to be an essential part of human nature, which have to be kept in due proportion. Bearing this in mind, it seems that a more plausible version of the "purgation" theory might be one which interprets catharsis as a process which rids us of *excessive* emotion. According to such an interpretation, the emotions are not so much purged as restored to a natural balance. As Butcher says:

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[49] *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, vi. (Trans. J.A.K. Thomson, Penguin Books ed., 1955).
[50] *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, vi. My italics.

> Aristotle held that it is not desirable to kill or to starve the emotional part of the soul, and that the regulated indulgence of the feelings serves to maintain the balance of our nature. [51]

In a similar vein, D.J. Allan argues:

> In general, [Aristotle] maintains that the indulgence of powerful emotions under conditions contrived for the purpose may calm them and render them less liable to obstruct the rational ordering of life; if so, [tragedy] will have an effect the reverse of that which Plato professes to fear. [52]

The second element in the purgation theory is the view that Aristotle uses catharsis as a religious metaphor meaning "purification". As I noted earlier, this kind of view is usually taken as being distinct from the "purgation" theory; Else, for instance, characterises the latter as involving "purgation or relief of the spirit *from* the emotions", and the former as "purification *of* the emotions"[53]. The distinction is also sometimes drawn by arguing that whilst the "purgation" theory interprets catharsis as a psychological or pathological process, "purification" theories suggest that it is a process concerned with morality[54].

The term "catharsis" undoubtedly has a religious as well as a medical sense in Greek. Liddell and Scott list one

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[51] Butcher, p.246.
[52] D.J. Allan, p.155. Versions of this view of catharsis are held by Ingram Bywater, in *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, (Oxford, 1909), D.S. Margoliouth, in *The Poetics of Aristotle*, (London, 1911), W.H. Fyfe, in *Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, (Oxford, 1940), L.J. Potts, in *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction*, (Cambridge, 1953), F.L. Lucas, and Humphry House, to name only a few of the most influential commentators.
[53] G.F. Else, p.227 n.19.
[54] See, for instance, Srivastava, pp.37-52.

of its meanings, for instance, as "cleansing of guilt or defilement"[55]. In this sense catharsis is a process by which the subject is morally cleansed, "washed free of sin". The suggestion implicit in the claim that Aristotle uses "catharsis" in the *Poetics* as a religious metaphor is that the tragic catharsis in some way improves us morally. G.E. Lessing argues:

> ... this purification rests in nothing else than in the transformation of passions into virtuous habits, and since according to our philosopher each virtue has two extremes between which it rests, it follows that if tragedy is to change our pity into virtue it must also be able to purify us from the two extremes of pity, and the same is to be understood of fear. Tragic pity must not only purify the soul of him who has too much of pity, but also of him who has too little; tragic fear must not simply purify the soul of him who does not fear any manner of misfortune but also of him who is terrified of every misfortune, even to the most distant and improbable.[56]

Lessing suggests, then, that catharsis "rests in nothing else than in the transformation of passions into virtuous habits...". The implication here is that the end of tragedy is to make its audience into more moral beings. Although it is presented in a more sophisticated or technical way than usual by Lessing, the view that drama is chiefly a didactic tool is of course not original to him; critics have for centuries argued that in watching, say, *Oedipus*, we learn of the folly of pride, of defying the gods, and so on[57]. However, is this what Aristotle is

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[55] Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, (9th ed., Oxford, 1940), pp.850-851. See also Srivastava for a list of uses of catharsis as a religious term.

[56] Lessing, translated by V. Lange, p.193.

[57] For an account of Greek views on this, see Butcher's

arguing, as Lessing would have us believe? In opposition to this, Butcher argues:

> Aristotle... was the first who attempted to separate the theory of aesthetics from that of morals. He maintains consistently that the end of poetry is a refined pleasure. In doing so he severs himself decisively from the older and more purely didactic tendency of Greece... [H]e never allows the moral purpose of the poet or the moral effects of his art to take the place of the artistic end. [58]

Butcher's claim is backed up by the text of the *Poetics*. Aristotle begins the work by stating his intention thus: "I propose to treat of Poetry in itself and of its various kinds, noting the essential quality of each"; his intention is clearly to study poetry as an end in itself. When he censures Euripides and praises Sophocles, it is not for the quality (or lack thereof) of their moral teaching, but for their technical skills as poets[59]. In Chapter XXV, (1461b), Aristotle says "...depravity of character [is] justly censured when there is no inner necessity for introducing [it]." The implication here is that the representation of immorality by the poet *is* permissible if the plot demands it. As Butcher notes, the successful artistic end, rather than the moral effect, of the work is of supreme importance to Aristotle. Given this, we can see that Lessing's theory cannot be correct in making moral purification the end of tragedy. This is not to say, however, that Lessing's view is completely mistaken; we might say rather that it is

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[57](cont'd) essay "Art and Morality", *op cit*, pp.215-239.
[58] Butcher, p.238.
[59] See, for instance, Chapters XVI (1455a), and XVIII (1456a).

misleading in its emphasis. Aristotle maintains that the end of tragedy is to give pleasure, and it is at least plausible to suggest that the emotional balance or equilibrium referred to by Lessing constitutes or contributes to that pleasure. Moral improvement may be an indirect result of the cathartic process -- in that the balancing of the emotions removes a hindrance to virtue -- but it is not the *end* of tragedy[40]. The central notion in Lessing's ("purification") theory, then, is that catharsis is a process through which the emotions are balanced, or kept in correct proportion. As we saw earlier, this is precisely the notion underlying purgation theories. It is my suggestion, therefore, that the two can fairly be characterised as variants of the same theory.

We are now in a position, I think, to give a general characterisation of the view that I referred to at the beginning of this chapter as the purgation theory of catharsis. The purgation in question is of *excessive* emotion, and the result of the cathartic process is to leave the individual in a state of emotional balance or equilibrium which in turn results in pleasure. Whether we take Aristotle to be using catharsis as a religious or a medical metaphor, whether "purgation" or "purification" is the better translation, this state of emotional balance or harmony is taken to be the result of the cathartic process.

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[40] Butcher argues this in support of his own interpretation of catharsis.

We must now turn to a consideration of whether the purgation theory of catharsis necessarily violates the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I. From the discussion above, it is clear that the idea that works of art can arouse real emotion in us is essential to the purgation theory. The emphasis of the theory is entirely on restoring emotional balance; if there is no possibility of being genuinely moved by art, then, the theory simply becomes vacuous. However, it should be noticed that there is nothing in the theory which suggests that these emotions necessarily have fictional objects. It might plausibly be suggested by the purgation theorist that the objects of the emotions aroused by a work of art are not fictional particulars, but "universals" of some kind. It should be noticed that this is a natural move for the purgation theorist to make; the resources which enable him to do so are given by the Aristotelian conception of art, and in particular poetry, as being essentially concerned with universals[1]. For example, if seeing a performance of *Othello* makes me angry, the object of my anger would not be any of the characters of the play, but something such as "the jealous nature of man". Walton refers to such possibilities when he says:

> Although Charles is not really afraid of the fictional slime depicted in the movie, the movie might nevertheless produce real fear in him. It might cause him to be afraid of something other than the slime it depicts... (*Jaws* caused a lot of people

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[1] This feature of Aristotle's conception of poetry will be discussed more fully in my next chapter.

> to fear sharks which they thought might really exist. But whether they were afraid of the fictional sharks in the movie is another question.) [12]

The attractiveness of this suggestion lies in that it seems to allow us to retain the intuition that we are, or can be, moved by fiction. It seems clear that we can have emotions whose objects are universals; we can hate violence or bigotry, envy success or happiness, and so on. These objects exist as universals (or at any rate they can be believed to exist) and can thus serve as the objects of genuine emotions according to the theory of emotion we are dealing with here. If it could be demonstrated that the objects of emotions aroused in us by works of fiction are universals, then, the intuition that we can be moved by fictions would be supported without violating the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion. This, it appears, would also provide a basis for traditional theories of catharsis[13].

I will argue here, however, that the suggestion that emotions aroused in us by fiction have objects which are universals will not help us in the attempt to give a characterisation of catharsis which captures traditional intuitions concerning emotional response to fiction without violating the constraints imposed by our theory of emotion;

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[12] "Fearing Fictions", p.10.

[13] In recent discussions of the possibility of being moved by fiction, some people have argued that the objects of the supposed emotions are fictional *situations* rather than fictional characters. (See, for instance, Michael Weston, and Don Mannison, "On Being Moved By Fiction", *Philosophy*, 60, 1985.) It might be argued that this move towards fictional situations is in effect the move towards universals; if this is the case, my comments here will apply to both.

nor, therefore, will it be able to save the purgation theory. Firstly, let us consider what it is to have an emotion whose object is a universal. The paradigmatic case can be expressed as follows: For any *x*, if *x* is ϕ, then other things being equal we will be disposed to act towards *x* in certain ways[‘‘]. Working from this formulation, it is plausible to argue that having an emotion whose object is a particular is a necessary condition for having an emotion whose object is a universal. We might say that this relationship between having an emotion whose object is a universal and having emotions the objects of which are particulars in circumstances in which that universal is instantiated is one of *abstraction*. On this formulation, the paradigmatic way of explaining how one comes to have emotions such as anger at human cruelty and pity for animal suffering is by referring back to one's being moved by particular states of affairs such as Smith kicking his dog, Jones strangling his cat, and so on. One is moved by universals through first being moved by particular states of affairs in which those universals are instantiated[‘‘]. As we

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[‘‘] I would emphasise that this is not meant to be a formal definition. It is worth pointing out, however, that a formulation in terms of disposition to action is consistent with both Walton's and Pitcher's views. (See "Fearing Fictions", pp.6-9, and "Emotion", p.333.)

[‘‘] Consider a case in which a person is not moved by actual circumstances in which animals are dealt with cruelly. His callousness would not only make it difficult to understand how he could ever have come to have pity for animal suffering in general, but (according to our theory of emotion and the resulting formulation of what it is to have an emotion whose object is a universal) would also provide grounds for denying that he has that emotion at all.

have seen, however, the theory of emotion we are dealing with here seems to deny the possibility that we can be moved by fictional characters or events. The suggestion is that *logically* I cannot feel anger at Othello or pity for Desdemona. Given that we cannot be moved by the relevant *particular* states of affairs, then, the suggestion that fiction can arouse real emotions in us the objects of which are the corresponding universals would appear to be untenable.

It may be objected, however, that experience of emotions whose objects are particulars is not a necessary condition for the having of emotions whose objects are universals. We can characterise this point as being that the movement from emotions of the former kind to emotions of the latter kind is not one of *abstraction* but of *inference*. For instance, let us say that I see various instances of human cruelty, and that from these I infer that it is a part of human nature to be cruel. It might be argued that it is conceptually possible for me to be moved by my conclusion without having been moved by any of the particular instances of human cruelty that led me to it. Whether or not this suggestion represents a conceptual possibility with regard to "real life", however, it does not help us in the case of fiction. It follows from our theory of emotion that for a state of affairs to generate an emotion it must be believed to be real. In order to make an inference from particular circumstances which results in an emotion whose object is a

universal, then, these particular states of affairs must be believed to be real. It is clear, however, that in responding to fiction we do not believe the characters or events depicted to be real; indeed, it is precisely this point which generated the dilemmas presented in Chapter I.

There may of course be other ways of explaining how emotions whose objects are universals are caused. In order to be of value in our attempt to give an account of catharsis, however, it seems clear that it is incumbent upon any such explanation to establish how it is that a work of fiction moves us; that is, how it produces the emotional effect that it does in us. I have argued that the suggestions discussed above cannot establish such a link without violating the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I. Furthermore, even if the suggestion that the emotions aroused in us by art have objects which are universals succeeded in guaranteeing the possibility of our having genuine emotions in response to fiction, it is not clear that it really meets our intuitions on the matter. Even if it is granted that works of fiction can arouse in us emotions whose objects are universals, it might be argued (and I think plausibly so) that our intuition is that we can also have emotions whose objects are fictional particulars. Colin Radford, for example, insists that:

> ...we do not really weep for the pain that a real person might suffer, and which real persons have suffered, when we weep for Anna Karenina, even if we should not be moved by her story if it were not of

> that sort. We weep for *her*. We are moved by what happens to her, by the situation she gets into, and which is a pitiful one, but we do not feel pity for her state or fate, or her history or her situation, or even for others, i.e., for real persons who might have or even have had such a history. We pity her, feel for her and our tears are shed for her. This thesis is even more compelling, perhaps, if we think about the death of Mercutio. ‘‘

In this chapter, we have established that the purgation theory of catharsis depends on the notion that we can have real emotions in response to fiction. I have argued here that even if we take the objects of these emotions to be universals, rather than fictional particulars, the theory violates the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I; and that even if this were not the case, such an interpretation fails to capture our intuitions concerning the nature of our emotional response to fiction. For these reasons, I suggest, the purgation theory cannot satisfy the requirements for the account of catharsis that I am aiming to give in this thesis. In the next chapter, therefore, we will turn to a consideration of a more recent interpretation of catharsis. This interpretation, I suggest, will be of more help to us in fulfilling these aims.

‘‘ Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved By The Fate of Anna Karenina?", *Proc. Aris. Soc.*, supp.vol. 49, (1975); p.75.

III. The Clarification Theory of Catharsis

> In sooth I know not why I am so sad:
> It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn.[17]

In response to the traditional theories of catharsis, discussed in the previous chapter, Leon Golden has argued that the cathartic process is essentially *intellectual*; this view has come to be known as the "clarification" or "intellectual" theory of catharsis[18]. Golden rejects the traditional accounts that take catharsis to be a matter of the purgation or purification of the emotions chiefly on the ground that they have no firm basis in the text of the *Poetics* itself[19]. Golden's claim is that:

> ...another interpretation of catharsis is possible which will bring it organically into connection with the argument of the *Poetics* that leads up to the use of the term in chapter 6 and will place it in a more effective and intimate relationship with other statements in the *Poetics*.[20]

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[17] *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene 1.
[18] See Leon Golden, "Catharsis", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, XCIII, 1962; "Mimesis and Catharsis", *Classical Philology*, LXIV, 1969; "The Clarification Theory of Catharsis", *Hermes*, 104, 1976.
[19] This is also argued by G.F. Else; see, for instance, pp.228, 440. For Golden's criticisms of the traditional views, see especially "The Clarification Theory of Catharsis", and his "The Purgation Theory of Catharsis", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31, 1973.
[20] Golden, "Catharsis", p.52.

It is my contention that Golden's interpretation of catharsis within the context of specifically Aristotelian concerns also provides us with the beginnings of an account that allows us to make sense of the concept within the framework of a more general concern with the nature of our response to fiction. In particular, Golden's account of the concept allows us to retain the intuition that the cathartic process has something to do with the emotions, yet does not violate the constraints imposed by the theory of emotions outlined in Chapter I.

Golden first notes that the placing of the catharsis clause at the end of the definition of tragedy indicates that its function is to denote the end, or goal, of tragedy'[1]. He also points out that before setting out the definition Aristotle explicitly claims to have discussed all its elements in the preceeding chapters of the work. It has frequently been pointed out that this is true of all the elements of the definition *except* the catharsis clause'[2]; indeed, it is precisely this omission that has generated the historical controversy over the meaning of the term. Golden's suggestion is that although Aristotle does not explicitly discuss catharsis elsewhere in the text of the *Poetics*, he does discuss the goal or "final cause" of tragedy; and that given the placing of the catharsis clause at the end of the formal definition, this discussion is of importance to the debate over the meaning of catharsis

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[1] See above, Chapter I, note 5.
[2] By Else, for instance; p.224.

itself.

Golden notes that Aristotle states several times throughout the text of the *Poetics* that poetry should give pleasure to its audience. In Chapter 23, (1459a20), he talks of the "proper pleasure" to be produced by epic poetry, and in Chapter 26, (1462b12), in comparing tragedy and epic verse, he suggests that "the two arts should produce, not any chance pleasure, but the one proper to them." In Chapter 14, Aristotle clearly indicates that the production of pleasure is the goal of the poet:

> For one must not seek any and every kind of pleasure from tragedy, but the one proper to it. *And since it is the pleasure that comes from pity and fear by means of imitation which the poet should try to produce*, it is clear that this must now be built into the plot. [73]

The "poet" that Aristotle is referring to here is the tragic poet, and we are told that there are two factors involved in the pleasure which it is his goal to produce: (i)fear and pity, and (ii)imitation. There is a question of priority that should be noticed here. In Chapter 1, Aristotle states that the various forms of poetry are all forms of *mimesis*, or imitation. The pleasure that is the end of poetry *in general*, then, is the pleasure that is associated with or involved in imitation. However, Aristotle also tells us that each form of poetry should produce a "proper" pleasure -- that is, a particular kind of pleasure appropriate to that form of poetry. The pleasure appropriate to tragedy is brought about through the representation or portrayal

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[73] Chapter 14, (1453b12-14). Else's translation, my italics.

(imitation) of people in circumstances *which in some way involve pity and fear*. This last sentence is of course extremely ambiguous -- precisely how pity and fear (or emotions in general) are involved will be crucial not only to an interpretation of Aristotle, but, more importantly for our purposes here, to the whole question of the role played by emotion in our response to fiction. We shall return to this issue shortly; for the moment, however, the crucial point to notice with respect to Golden's theory is that of the two elements involved in the pleasure that tragedy should produce, "imitation" is in an important sense prior to "pity and fear".

At the beginning of Chapter 4 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle says:

> As to the *general* origin of the poetic art, it stands to reason that two causes gave birth to it, both of them natural: (1) Imitation is a part of man's nature from childhood, and he differs from the other animals in the fact that he is especially mimetic and learns his first lessons through imitation, as is the fact that they all get pleasure from works of imitation. An indication of the latter is what happens in our experience. There are things we find painful to look at themselves, but of which we view the most accurate reproductions with pleasure: for example, replicas of the most unprepossessing animals, or of cadavers. The reason for this also is that learning is highly pleasurable not only to philosophers but to the rest of mankind in the same way, although their share of it is limited. For that is why people enjoy seeing the reproductions: because in their viewing they find they are learning, inferring what class each object belongs to: for example that "this individual is a so-and-so". '[4]

Imitation, then, is a part of human nature, and it is

'[4] Chapter 4, (1448b4-19). Else's translation.

through imitation that man learns, or gains knowledge, most naturally. Works of imitation give us pleasure, even representations of objects that would revolt us if we were confronted by the original. The reason for this, Aristotle states, is that we *learn* from imitations, and it is a fact of human nature that learning is pleasant to us. As Else puts it, "Pleasure in learning belongs to all men, because the desire to learn is a fundamental impulse."[75]

Golden's arguments thus far can be summarised as follows. Firstly he notes that catharsis seems to denote the end or goal of tragedy, and suggests that although Aristotle does not explicitly discuss catharsis elsewhere in the *Poetics*, he does discuss the goal of poetry. That goal is the production of pleasure in the audience, and is, to generalise, the pleasure human beings receive from imitation, of which poetry is a form. This pleasure is produced because we *learn* from imitations, and learning is naturally pleasant. As Else says:

> Tragedy is in the first place a species of imitation and must produce the pleasure appropriate to all imitations: a pleasure which... is basically

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[75] Else, pp.129-32. He notes that Aristotle's claim here is a challenge to the Platonic view that men are on the whole irrational, and that imitations ("appearances") lead us away from knowledge of reality, and that the poet only encourages our ignorance. Aristotle is saying here that the desire for knowledge is a fundamnetal human impulse, not restricted to philosophers; that imitation helps us to *gain* knowledge; and that the artist promotes our natural desire to learn.

In his "Mimesis and Catharsis", Golden gives an account of Plato on mimesis which suggests that the two philosophers have more in common on the subject of imitation (and on the concept of catharsis itself) than Else's comments here indicate.

intellectual.'[6]

The end or goal of tragedy, then, consists in a *learning process* of some kind. Golden suggests that what Aristotle means by "learning" is made clear in the passage from Chapter 4 of the *Poetics* quoted above: "in their viewing they find they are learning, inferring what class each object belongs to: for example that 'this individual is a so-and-so'." Else notes in his commentary that by "learning" and "inferring", Aristotle does not mean the recognition that "this person represents that person", but rather that "this person represents that *kind* of person":

> In Aristotle's terms, if you have merely recognised the resemblance of one individual (the portrayed one...) to another individual (the original...) you have not learned anything. Learning and knowledge are of universals; the individual *per se* is unknowable... The first question for the would-be knower is...: to what genus does this individual belong?... In other words the trick of recognising and identifying images or reproductions is *a part of the general process of acquiring experience*, and is pleasurable for the same reason, because we are learning a part of the grand structure of genera and species which constitutes reality. '[7]

Golden's claim, then, is that we learn from imitation by moving from a perception of the particular to an awareness of the universal which governs it. Poetry, as a form of imitation, is concerned with the universal. In support of this claim, he cites Chapter 9 of the *Poetics*:

> From what has been said it is clear too that the poet's job is not to tell what has happened but the kinds of things that *can* happen, i.e., the kinds of events that are possible according to probability or necessity... [The difference between history and

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'[6] Else, pp.447-8.
'[7] Else, p.132.

> poetry is this:] poetry tells us rather the universals, history the particulars. "Universal" means what kinds of thing a certain kind of person will say or do in accordance with probability or necessity, which is what poetic composition aims at... '[78]

In summary, Golden suggests that we learn from poetry thus:

> The artist so organises his work that the spectator is able to infer, from the individual circumstances pictured before him, the universal law that subsumes them. This movement from the particular to the universal involves a learning process in that it renders clearer and more distinct the significance of the events presented in a work of art. '[79]

Golden has argued that the production of pleasure is the goal of the poet, and has identified that pleasure as consisting in learning from imitation. The pleasure of tragedy, then, as a form of poetry, consists in learning. However, as we noted earlier, *tragic* pleasure is differentiated from other forms of poetic pleasure in that it specifically involves pity and fear, and therefore Golden argues that tragedy in some way involves learning about pity and fear. "...tragedy consists of the artistic representation of particular pitiful and fearful events in such a way that we are led to see the universal laws that make these particular events meaningful"[80].

Having argued that the goal or end of tragedy is a learning process by which the audience is made aware of the "universal laws" that make the pitiful and fearful events portrayed "meaningful", and that the term catharsis functions in the definition of tragedy as its end or goal,

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[78] Chapter 9, (1451a36-b10). Else's translation.
[79] Golden, "Catharsis", p.54.
[80] Golden, "Catharsis", p.55.

Golden points out that there is an interpretation of the term that allows us to see the two statements of end or goal as being closely related. Citing as evidence passages from the works of Plato, Epicurus, Philodemus, Euripides, and Aristophanes, Golden establishes that it is possible to translate "catharsis" as "clarification", *in an intellectual sense*, and that this translation is "as easily derived and is as fully justified" as those which read the term as "purgation" or "purification"[81]. Thus he translates the final clause of Aristotle's definition as: "achieving, through the representation of pitiful and fearful situations, the clarification of such incidents"[82], and claims that:

> All art forms... are essentially learning experiences whose climax or goal is an insight or inference from the individual artistic representation to a universal truth.[83]

Golden claims that when catharsis is interpreted in the way that he has suggested "it articulates closely with the general argument of the *Poetics* in a way that is not true of the standard renditions of the term as 'purgation' or 'purification'"[84]. I shall not attempt here to assess the relative merits of the two kinds of account as interpretations of Aristotle's thought. Rather, I suggest that whatever the advantages of his theory over the traditional theories in terms of Aristotelian scholarship,

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[81] See especially "Catharsis", pp.55-58, and "The Clarification Theory of Catharsis", pp.444-445.
[82] Golden, "Catharsis", p.58.
[83] Golden, "Mimesis and Catharsis", p.148.
[84] Golden, "Mimesis and Catharsis", p.147.

Golden's account of catharsis allows us to make more sense of the concept in the context of questions concerning the role of emotion in our response to fiction. The dilemma with regard to catharsis in the light of the theory of emotion that I outlined in my first chapter arose because of the common intuition that catharsis denotes a process that is fundamentally to do with the emotions. The crucial question concerning the concept thus became that of *how* emotions are involved in the cathartic process. The traditional answers to this question, we saw, suggested that the work arouses emotions in us which are then released, leaving us "purged" or "purified" emotionally. This account of the cathartic process, I argued, conflicts with the constraints imposed by what I am taking to be the correct account of emotion. If we accept it as the correct account of catharsis we are forced to abandon either that theory of emotion or the concept of catharsis itself.

Golden's account of catharsis, as we have seen, gives us an answer to the question of how the emotions are involved in the cathartic process in terms of *learning*. He argues that our *having* emotions in response to works of art has nothing to do with the cathartic process[55]; and that given this, catharsis cannot be defined in terms of purgation or purification. Catharsis is concerned with "the clarification of reality": it is an intellectual process through which we learn something about the nature of the

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[55] See "Catharsis", p.59.

emotions. This account thus allows us to retain the intuition that catharsis is concerned with the emotions, whilst the claim that catharsis involves an intellectual rather than an emotional experience avoids violating the constraints imposed by our theory of emotion.

Golden's concern, clearly, is to make the concept of catharsis intelligible in the context of the rest of the *Poetics*, and indeed of Aristotelian philosophy as a whole. As such, his theory depends upon specifically Aristotelian notions of imitation, pleasure, learning, and so on. It is my suggestion, however, that the notion of catharsis as an intellectual process can be spelled out in such a way that it does not commit us to accepting the Aristotelian doctrines that Golden relies on. My attempt to do so will centre on two issues which, in particular, stand in obvious need of further discussion. Firstly, exactly what is it that we are supposed to learn from fiction through the cathartic process? Secondly, how does the process work -- that is, *how* is it that we learn from fictions? In answering these questions, I shall be expanding on and clarifying Golden's comments concerning the power of art to make us aware of "universal laws", my aim being to show that the notion of catharsis as a learning process is important and useful beyond the limits of Golden's specifically Aristotelian enterprise.

IV. Learning from Fiction

> An emotion therefore becomes more under our control, and the mind is less passive to it, in proportion as it is more known to us. ''

Leon Golden has given an account of the cathartic process in Aristotelian terms, according to which it is a *learning* process resulting in some kind of "clarification of reality". Catharsis is not a matter of the arousal or experience of emotion, he argues, but of learning something about the nature of emotion. As we have seen, this account has the advantage of allowing us to retain the intuition that the cathartic process is concerned with the emotions, whilst it does not violate the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I. Thus it seems a possible candidate for the "cathartic" process sketched by Walton:

> It is chiefly by fictionally facing certain situations, engaging in certain activities, and having or expressing certain feelings, I think, that a dreamer, fantasizer, or game player comes to terms with his actual feelings -- that he discovers them, learns to accept them, purges himself of them, or whatever exactly it is that he does.''

Golden's account, however, is specifically concerned with the notion of catharsis in Aristotelian philosophy, and his

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'' Spinoza, *The Ethics*, Part V, Prop. III.
'' "Fearing Fictions", p.24.

notion of learning -- "a movement from the particular to the universal" -- is only developed within the context of the Aristotelian conceptions of art, imitation, and pleasure on which it depends. In this chapter I will attempt to provide an account of how and what we learn from fiction that goes beyond the concerns of specifically Aristotelian scholarship. My contention is that if this account is successful, it will provide us with an important part of the answer to, as Walton puts it,

> the basic question of why and how fiction is important, why we find it valuable, why we do not dismiss novels, films, and plays as "mere fiction" and hence unworthy of serious attention. **

Let us consider first the question of how it is that we "learn" from fiction. In some ways, at least, it does not seem that this question is particularly problematic. For instance, the character Big Bird, from television's *Sesame Street*, teaches children to count; the fact that children do (or at least can) learn from him does not strike us as puzzling, despite his difference in ontological status from a first-grade teacher at Strathcona Elementary School. Similarly, it would seem that we can learn that Brighton is an English seaside town from Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* as well as from a geography text-book or atlas. We can, then, learn pieces of information or facts of some sort from fiction.

The question that we are concerned with here, however, is that of how we can learn about *emotions* from fiction.

** "Fearing Fictions", p.6.

This question, it might appear, is rendered problematic by the constraints that the theory of emotions outlined in Chapter I imposes on the possibility of having emotions the objects of which are fictional entities. It is plausible to suggest that learning about emotions requires personal emotional experience; that is, that we *learn* about the nature of emotion by, or through, *experiencing* emotions. For instance, we might say that a child learns about "love" by having that emotion, in various ways and towards various objects: love for his parents, for friends, sexual love, love of art, of his country, and so on. However, whilst a person might love, say, Shakespeare's writing (which is real), the theory of emotions outlined earlier suggests that he cannot love Shakespeare's characters (which are not). How then can we learn about emotion from fictional entities towards which (it is suggested) we feel no emotion?

The suggestion sketched above, then, appears to pose a threat to the possibility of our learning about the nature of emotion from fiction. However, I shall argue that this suggestion is misleading in that it construes the notion of "emotional experience" too narrowly. It becomes apparent that this is so when we see that although it seems to be based on the commonsense theory of emotion that we are concerned with here, it in fact runs counter to that theory. Both Bedford and Pitcher, we may recall, placed great emphasis on the *public* nature of emotion concepts:

> Emotion concepts... are not purely psychological: they presuppose concepts of social relationships and

> institutions, and concepts belonging to systems of judgment, moral, aesthetic, and legal. In using emotion words we are able, therefore, to relate behavior to the complex background in which it is enacted, and so to make human actions intelligible.''

However, in arguing that learning about emotions requires or presupposes the having or feeling of those emotions, the suggestion we are considering here draws its inspiration from a long philosophical tradition, (encompassing both Descartes and Hume, for example), according to which emotions are feelings and thus an essentially *private* matter. There is a sense in which it does seem obviously true to say, for example, that one can never *really* know what love is unless one has experienced it oneself. The intuition here is that our mental experience, including emotion, is essentially private; and it is grounded in a tradition which holds that the only facts which we can know for certain are facts about our own mental states, these being the only facts directly accessible to us. Our knowledge of the external world and of other minds, which is not directly accessible to us, is based (whether by analogy, the goodness of God, inductive reasoning, and so on) on this primary, immediate knowledge of one's own mental experience. Traditionally, however, this kind of philosophical theory has given rise to scepticism: given that I have no direct access to the minds of others, how can I be certain that what I call "love" is what is referred to by others as "love"? This sceptical position is largely what Wittgenstein

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'' Bedford, p.98.

is attacking in his argument against the possibility of a "private language"[10], and is characterised by him as follows:

> The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible -- though unverifiable -- that one section of mankind had one sensation of red and another section another. [11]
>
> If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain" means -- must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalise the *one* case so irresponsibly?
>
> Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case! -- Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. -- Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. -- But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language? -- If so, it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty. -- No, one can "divide through" by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is. [12]

Pushed to its furthest extreme, this position becomes one of scepticism with regard to the existence of other minds at all: not only might your "beetle" be different from mine, you may not even have one at all. The central thrust of Wittgenstein's "private language argument" is that for the language of mental experience to function as it does, (or even function at all), our concepts of mental experience must be governed by *public* criteria. The theory of emotion

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[10] See *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1958); §§243-363. Henceforth *P.I.*

[11] *P.I.*, §272.

[12] *P.I.*, §293.

outlined in my first chapter is a specific application of this general doctrine to our understanding of emotion, and it is clear that in arguing that emotions are essentially *private*, the suggestion we are considering here runs counter to that theory. I shall argue here that given a broader conception of what is involved in the experience of emotion, one that makes emotional experience a "public" matter, the problematic aspect of the question of how we learn about emotion from fiction disappears.

Firstly, to construe "emotional experience" simply in terms of the *having* of, or feeling, emotion is to understate the case. It seems clear that one of the ways in which we learn about the nature of particular emotions is by having those emotions ourselves, but this is surely not the whole story. An essential element in one's experience of love, for instance, apart from that of loving others, is that of *being* loved by others; it may even be the case that the latter is in some sense "prior" to the former. Noting this feature of "emotional experience", of course, will not by itself resolve our difficulty concerning learning about emotion from fiction; for whatever we may feel (or "feel") for fictional characters, it is clear that they cannot feel anything for us''.

A further way in which we learn about the nature of particular emotions is by seeing them, so to speak, "in use" by others. For example, let us say that Jack loves Jill. We

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'' See Kendall Walton, "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", p.12.

can see (at least some of) the effects that feeling the emotion have on Jack, and that being the object of the emotion have on Jill; and in doing so we can learn about aspects of love that (perhaps) would not have been disclosed to us through our *personal* experience of the emotion. We know that love can be destructive, futile, misplaced, as well as overwhelming, enriching, and so on. Our awareness of these varying aspects of "love", I suggest, is largely gained through seeing in others the effects of having and being the object of the emotion. It is on this aspect of our "emotional experience" that I wish to base my account of how we learn about emotions from fiction. In doing so, I shall be drawing on Wittgenstein's talk in his later philosophy about the meaning of a concept being revealed in the way in which it is used in a particular form of life. It will be useful to have a brief account of these ideas here.

Wittgenstein's account can be seen as attacking a traditional empiricist theory of meaning. In order to bring out what this kind of theory involves, Wittgenstein begins the *Investigations* by quoting at length from Augustine's *Confessions*:

> When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out... Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified.

He then goes on to say:

> -- In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This

> meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. ''

The point here might be expressed in the following way. This account, in trying to explain how what we say, (our language), links up with independent reality, suggests that words stand for objects, and that the *meaning* of a word is the idea of the object that it stands for or refers to. Thus an expression or phrase can, so to speak, be "checked" against the ideas that it represents, and the meaning discovered''. Against this, Wittgenstein argues that language grows out of and is determined by human activity as a whole. In *On Certainty*, he says "[O]ur talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings", and "A meaning of a word is a kind of employment of it"''. His suggestion is that the way to find out or learn what a concept means is to look at its grammar; that is, at the way in which it is *used*.

> For a large class of cases -- though not for all -- in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language. ''

If, for example, you pointed out to me two people "playing" Russian roulette, and told me that they were engaged in the activity of playing a game, I might agree or disagree with you. However, in order to do either, I must know the kind of thing that a game is. As Wittgenstein's well-known analysis

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'' *P.I.*, §1.
'' This is, of course, an inadequate characterisation of this view of the nature of meaning; however, it should suffice for our purposes here.
'' *On Certainty*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1969); §§229, 61.
'' *P.I.*, §43.

of that concept demonstrates, there are no necessary conditions for the application of "game"; the way in which I know what the concept means is by knowing the way that it is *used*, by knowing how it is applied in other instances, and so on: in other words, by knowing the overall role of the word in language''.

> So one might say: the ostensive definition explains the use -- the meaning -- of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear. ''

The "overall role of the word in language" is determined for Wittgenstein by *criteria*. It should be noticed that Wittgenstein's use of "criterion" differs from the ordinary use of the term. This point is well brought out by Cavell in *The Claim of Reason*. There he introduces a distinction between criteria as used by J.L. Austin and Wittgensteinian criteria. The former, he says, "relate this name to that (species of) object. It is a full test of your possession of the criteria... if you can recognise and name another such object when you see one..."'°°. Criteria as used by Austin, then, have to do with the attaching of names (or predicates) to particular (kinds of) object. Wittgensteinian criteria, however, are in an important sense "prior" to criteria as Austin uses the term: knowledge of

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'' See *P.I.*, §§65-75.
'' *P.I.*, §30.
'°° Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979); p.73. Henceforth *CR*. On the difference between Wittgensteinian and ordinary uses of "criterion", see also John V. Canfield, *Wittgenstein: Language and World*, (University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), Chapter 3; and Roger A. Shiner, "Canfield, Cavell and Criteria", *Dialogue*, XXII (1983).

the former is presupposed in knowledge of the latter.

> One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing's name. But what does one have to know?
>
> We may say: only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name. [101]

The "something" that one has to know before being capable of asking a thing's name (that is, before being capable of subsuming an object under a concept, or using Austinian criteria) is "the overall role of the word in language": Wittgensteinian criteria. As Cavell says: "The criteria do not relate a name to an object, but, we might say, various concepts to the concept of that object"; "They establish the position of the concept of an 'object' in our system of concepts"[102]. If you do not know these criteria, "then you lack, as it were, not only a piece of information or knowledge but the possibility of aquiring any information about such objects *uberhaupt*"[103]. Before we can meaningfully ask, for example, what the population of Russia is, we have to have the concepts of "Russia" and "population"; we have to know that Russia is the kind of thing that can have a population but not a toothache, that the concept of "population" is related to that of "number" in a way that "Russia" is not, and so on. The fact that we do possess these criteria is revealed in:

> ...your ability to use the concept in conjunction with other concepts, your knowledge of which concepts are relevant to the one in question and

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[101] *P.I.*, §§30,31.
[102] *CR*, p.73, 76.
[103] *CR*, p.77.

> which are not; your knowledge of how various relevant concepts, used in conjunction with the concepts of different kinds of objects, require different kinds of contexts for their competent employment. '[84]

How is it, then, that we gain possession of Wittgensteinian criteria? Wittgenstein says "It would be an answer to say: 'I have learnt English'"'[85]. Cavell's gloss: "Is there any less general answer to this than 'In coming to talk'? And would it make any difference if we said, 'In coming to know what things are, what people do'?" "But anybody who can speak knows these things"'[86]. We possess Wittgensteinian criteria by virtue of being members of a culture, a community, a form of life, for in a deep sense our criteria *are* our form of life.

> You cannot use words to do what we do with them unless you are initiate of the forms of life which give those words the point and shape they have in our lives. '[87]

However, Wittgenstein emphasises that "I know what a word means *in certain contexts*"'[88]. His point here is that we gain our knowledge of criteria in the process we call "learning a language", but that we do not do so exhaustively; we do not learn all of the ways in which a concept is used in learning language.

> We don't say that the man who tells us he feels the visual image two inches behind the bridge of his nose is telling a lie or talking nonsense. But we

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'[84] *CR*, p.73.
'[85] *P.I.*, §381. Cf. "You learned the *concept* 'pain' when you learned language". (§384).
'[86] *CR*, pp.43, 56.
'[87] *CR*, p.184.
'[88] *The Blue and Brown Books*, (Oxford, Blackwells, 1969); p.9. (Henceforth *BB*.)

> say that we don't understand the meaning of such a phrase. It combines well-known words, but combines them in a way we don't yet understand. The grammar of the phrase has yet to be explained to us.'[10]'

To fail to understand the use of a concept in certain circumstances is, for Wittgenstein, a failure to grasp the *meaning* of that concept. This is a matter of not possessing the criteria by which the concept is being applied. To "explain the grammar" of a concept is to give the criteria by which it is applied, which is to give (part of) the meaning of the concept. Wittgenstein's suggestion is that we go about this through a series of what we might call "grammatical investigations", through looking at the way in which the concept is used in particular circumstances.

> We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the "*possibilities*" of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena... Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. '[11]

It is by looking at "the kind of statement" that we make about concepts and thus learning how to use them, then, that we learn the meaning of those concepts. As Cavell says: "To know how to use the word 'anger' is to know what *anger* is."[12]

I suggest that this notion of Wittgenstein's provides us with one (though not the only) model for understanding how it is that we learn from fiction. According to this model, works of fiction can be seen as a series of

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[10] *BB*, p.10.
[11] *P.I.*, §90.
[12] *CR*, p.185.

"grammatical investigations", directed towards "the possibilities of phenomena". In reading or watching fiction, we are presented with concepts in use in particular circumstances and situations. By providing examples of the way in which certain concepts are used, the work reveals the criteria which govern them. Thus, for example, *Othello* can be seen as being among other things an investigation into the grammar of "jealousy". Through observing the way in which jealousy is compared and contrasted to other concepts such as envy, hate, love, honour, and so on -- that is, through observing how the concept is used and works in the context of the play -- we can extend our knowledge of the criteria which govern our use of jealousy, which make jealousy what it is in our form of life. It is the possession of these criteria that gives us the possibility of identifying jealousy, of distinguishing it from other emotions; indeed, of knowing what jealousy *is*. In watching *Othello*, and thus extending our knowledge of the criteria of the concept, these possibilities are enhanced and increased.

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the notion of one's gaining emotional experience need not involve oneself actually having or being the object of an emotion -- that is, that emotional experience need not be *private*. This point is made explicitly by Bedford, when he argues that "we learn about our emotions essentially in the same way as other people learn about them"[1][2]. We learn about emotions

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[1][2] Bedford, p.81.

primarily not by introspection, but by observing human action within the context of "social relationships and institutions... systems of judgment, moral, aesthetic, and legal"[113]. My suggestion was that one can, for example, learn about what love is by observing a love affair between Jack and Jill. On the account of how it is that we learn from fiction that I am advocating here, reading or watching works of fiction is analogous to observing Jack and Jill's romance. In both cases, we can learn about aspects of an emotion through seeing that concept in use in particular contexts. I noted earlier that it may well be that in watching Jack and Jill we can learn about aspects of love that would not have been revealed to us through our personal experience of loving and being loved. It seems clear that this possibility is even greater in the case of responding to and learning from works of fiction, where the subtlety of the way in which concepts are put to work, and the richness of the situations in which they are used, are limited only by the skill of the author.

In this chapter, I have given an account of *how* it is that we learn from fiction based on Wittgenstein's arguments that the meaning of a concept is revealed in the way in which it is used in language. My suggestion here has been that we learn from works of fiction by seeing in them concepts in use in particularly rich and complex situations. This account also indicated *what* it is that we learn from

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[113] Bedford, p.98.

fiction; namely, the criteria which govern our use of concepts and structure language. Unlike the theory of catharsis offered by Golden, my account of how it is that we learn from fiction is not dependent upon specifically Aristotelian conceptions of art and imitation. My suggestion has been that as "grammatical investigations", or extended explorations of criteria, works of fiction provide us with the resources to broaden our knowledge not only of the meanings of particular concepts but of the nature of our form of life itself. This account, I suggest, provides a substantial part of the answer to Walton's question concerning the importance and value of fiction. In my next chapter, I shall further develop this answer through a consideration of Stanley Cavell's notion of acknowledgment.

V. Acknowledging Fictions

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?'[1]

Thus far, we have considered Golden's account of *catharsis*, which suggests that the cathartic process involves some kind of learning experience, an account of the concept that does not conflict with the constraints imposed by the theory of emotion outlined in Chapter I. In the last chapter, I gave an account of what this learning process involves; my suggestion was that we learn about the criteria for the application of concepts from literature, by seeing there these concepts in use. In this chapter we will return to the issue of the possibility of having emotions with fictional objects, by way of a discussion of Cavell's concept of acknowledgment. Considering this problem again will allow us to complete our outline of catharsis as a learning process.

As I indicated in Chapter IV, it is a central tenet of Wittgenstein's later thought that the meaning of a word is given by the ways in which it is used in particular "language-games". If we want to find out more about what a word means, then, we should look at particular instances or

[1] *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2.

situations in which it is used; the differences in the way in which it is used from case to case show us the range and subtlety of the criteria which govern its use, and thus of its meaning. Cavell makes this point in speaking about ordinary language philosophy at the beginning of his study of *King Lear*:

> ...specifically the issue is one of placing the words and experiences with which philosophers have always begun in alignment with human beings in particular circumstances who can be imagined to be having those experiences and saying and meaning those words. This is all that "ordinary" in the phrase "ordinary language philosophy" means, or ought to mean... It reminds us that whatever words are said and meant are said and meant by particular men, and that to understand what they (the words) mean you must understand what they (whoever is using them) mean... '[1]

Thus, I have suggested, we can see a work of fiction as investigating the grammar of concepts by putting them to work in particular sets of circumstances or situations; and that by studying these situations, we can learn more about how to use those concepts, and thus about what they mean. "Jealousy" means what it does in *Othello* because it is used in a certain set of circumstances: those portrayed in the play. To understand what jealousy means in the play we have to understand these circumstances. Similarly, we only understand Othello's "Put out the light, and then put out the light", and Lear's Fool's "Nothing will come of nothing, nuncle", because (or if) we understand the contexts in which they are spoken. In other contexts or circumstances, their

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[1] Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love", reprinted in *Must We Mean What We Say?*, (Cambridge University Press, 1976); p.270.

meaning might be quite different.

> We ask "What does 'I am frightened' really mean, what am I referring to when I say it?" And of course we find no answer, or one that is inadequate.
> The question is: "In what sort of context does it occur?"'''

The point of embarking upon the kind of grammatical investigations that Wittgenstein does in his later philosophy, then, is to see how words function differently in different contexts, to increase our knowledge of their overall role in language, of our criteria. In order to understand and thus learn from these investigations, we must be able to understand the contexts or situations in question. As I indicated in the previous chapter, Wittgenstein holds that language arises out of the sphere of human activity as a whole: "our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings". The criteria which govern our use of concepts, our language, are thus internal to human activity, or "the human form of life"'''. It follows from this that the circumstances or situations in which the concepts in question are being used are essentially *human* situations, by which I mean that they are of, or within, the human form of life'''. Understanding this is crucial to

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''' *P.I.*, p.188. Cf. §§525, 583, 652. See also *BB*, pp. 19-20, 145-7, 157.

''' See R.A. Shiner, "Canfield, Cavell and Criteria": "our form of life and our criteria are one" (p.264).

''' It should be noted here that the phrase "the human form of life" is not Wittgenstein's. His notion of a "form of life" is somewhat ambiguous, and there has been much dispute as to whether he would have accepted that it has any meaning as I am using it here. See, for instance, John Cook, "Human Beings", in *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, ed. Peter Winch, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); J. Teichman, "Wittgenstein on Persons and Human Beings", in

understanding grammatical investigations, and so to being able to extend our knowledge of criteria.

The point I have sketched above, however, appears to pose a threat to my account of how it is that we learn from fiction. I will characterise this as the "philistine's" threat. As Don Mannison says:

> [We] might always be in a position to argue successfully that the "odds" were simply enormously against the actual occurrence of situations... of the sort portrayed in *King Lear* or *Anna Karenina*. I lack anything resembling a "knock-down argument" here, but can only point to the strangeness of allowing epistemology to enthrone and enshrine this variety of Philistinism. '''

It seems clear that some works of fiction are in some sense "about" our world, or the human form of life: the novels of Saul Bellow or Virginia Woolf, for instance. By introducing the notions of allegories or fables, this class might be extended so as to include fairy-tales, animal stories, works of science-fiction and fantasy, and so on. But it will be objected by the philistine that to construe this as meaning that the situations depicted in works of fiction are "of the human form of life" is to stretch things too far. Characters such as Anna Karenina and King Lear are obviously not human beings, they are fictions. This is even more obvious, he will point out, if we consider Bilbo Baggins, or the Cyclops. And if the characters are fictional, so must be

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'''(cont'd) *Understanding Wittgenstein*, ed. G. Vesey, (London: Macmillan, 1974); Peter Winch, "Nature and Convention", in his *Ethics and Action*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); Roy Holland, "Is Goodness A Mystery?", in his *Against Empiricism*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1980).

''' Don Mannison, "On Being Moved By Fiction", p.84.

their situations or circumstances. Fictional situations, it will be said, are just that -- fictional -- and the best that can be said about their relation to *our* world, to the human form of life, is that some of them represent some empirically unlikely, but possible, events.

Our philistine here is of course quite correct in his assertion that the situations portrayed in works of fiction *are* fictional, and that we know this to be the case. The crucial issue here, however, is whether or not this assertion *necessarily* involves the denial of the possibility of seeing fictional situations as being of our form of life. If the philistine's assertion does involve this denial, it appears that we will be forced to reject my account of learning from fiction. If we cannot understand fictional situations as being in an important sense human situations, the notion of works of fiction being Wittgensteinian grammatical investigations into criteria and the meanings of concepts becomes unintelligible. I will argue here, however, that the concepts being investigated in fiction are distinctively human concepts (by which I mean that their use is a function of our criteria, of our form of life), and that the situations or contexts in which they are at work *can* be seen as being of or within the human form of life in spite of the fact that they are fictional. Seeing that this is so is not an epistemic matter, however; rather, I want to suggest, it requires what Cavell terms "acknowledgment" on

our part'[20]. My suggestion is that this notion will not only give support to my account of how it is that we learn from fiction, but will also provide us with the means by which we can understand how it is that we can have genuine emotions the objects of which are fictions.

Cavell argues that there is no foundation to our knowledge beyond what he calls "our mutual attunement or agreement in our criteria", what Wittgenstein described as "agreement in judgments" or "agreement in forms of life". This agreement makes possible both language and knowledge: as human beings we are *internally related* to other human beings through this mutual attunement or agreement. The notion of internal relationship is at the heart of Cavell's concepts of acknowledgment and avoidance, kinship and separation. Essentially the point is this. As the philistine denies that the characters and situations depicted in fiction are of our form of life, so the sceptic in the traditional problem of other minds rejects the humanity (or "personhood") of other *homo sapiens*. (In effect, he denies that there *is* a human form of life in denying the role of

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'[20] Cavell's non-epistemic concept of "acknowledgment" is introduced in his paper "Knowing and Acknowledging"; the concept is developed in "The Avoidance of Love", and more fully in *The Claim of Reason*. The concept is introduced in response to what Cavell calls "the genuineness of the threat posed by scepticism", and out of dissatisfaction with the foundationalist attempt to dismiss that threat. A discussion of these epistemological concerns would require a thesis in itself, and would in any case be out of place here. Rather, I shall concentrate on a specific application of the notion to aesthetics. In particular, I will go on to argue that "acknowledgment" is a valuable resource for understanding the mechanism of our response to fiction.

agreement and community.) Thus he will respond to my claim that I know that you are not at this moment in excruciating pain by saying that for all I know you *are* in excruciating pain but are hiding it from me.

The threat posed by the sceptic here is a serious one: we *are*, so to speak, separated by our bodies. Direct knowledge of what is happening in your mind is unattainable, and therefore for all I know you might be, as Cavell puts it, "an automaton, a zombie, an android, an angel, an alien of some unheard of kidney."[121] Cavell argues that this is the "truth" of scepticism'[122] Where the sceptic goes wrong, he suggests, is in concentrating on the separation between human beings, and ignoring the kinship that exists between us. We *are* separate -- as Cavell puts it, "Join hands here as we may, one of the hands is mine and the other is yours,"[123]. Knowing, or rather acknowledging, another involves an awareness and an acceptance of that separateness, of our difference, of our individuality. However, there is also kinship between us: we are internally related through our agreement in judgments, which is what makes knowledge possible at all.

The affirmation of this kinship, which is at the same time an overcoming of our separateness, is what Cavell calls "acknowledgment"; it is an affirmation of my humanity and yours. In acknowledging, I "reveal" myself to you; I

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[121] *CR*, pp.423-4.
[122] *CR*, p.448.
[123] "The Avoidance of Love", p.340.

recognise the internal relationship between us: it is as much a matter of understanding something about myself as about you. The opposite of, or alternative to, acknowledgment is "avoidance" -- the concentration on our separateness and the exclusion of our kinship. Avoidance, it should be noticed, involves denying something about oneself as well as about others. Our concepts, the use of which are directed and made possible by agreement in judgments, are fundamentally *communal*: I cannot coherently retain *my* humanity whilst denying that of others. Thus Cavell argues that scepticism with regard to other minds, whilst it contains an important truth -- that we cannot *know* of the existence of other minds -- is ultimately incoherent. Our relationship to others is not one of knowing, but of *acknowledgment*.

Cavell's reading of *King Lear* in "The Avoidance of Love" depends heavily and explicitly on the notions of acknowledgment and avoidance. His implicit suggestion is that by showing us these concepts in use, the play can show or tell us more about what they mean. A brief account of Cavell's interpretation of the play will make clearer how he thinks these concepts work. He says:

> [The] motivation which manipulates the tragedy throughout its course, from the scene which precedes the abdication, through the storm, blinding, evaded reconciliations, to the final moments... [is] the attempt to avoid recognition, the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation. [124]

Very briefly, the point is that Lear will not acknowledge

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[124] "The Avoidance of Love", p.286.

that Cordelia loves him because he sees her love as making a claim upon him, as a demand that he should return her love in kind. In thus avoiding her, he avoids revealing certain things about himself, avoids revealing them both to himself and to others; namely, that he does not dare, or even know how to give or to accept love, and that he would rather have the public and empty "love" that his other daughters are so ready to give, "love" that makes no demand on him and which he does not have to return. Tragedy is contingent; it is not the result of the inexorable workings of fate but of a failure of acknowledgment, a distinctively human failing. Cavell's reading of *Lear*, then, suggests that it is a play about acknowledgment and avoidance, an investigation into the grammar of these concepts. Whether or not this reading of the play is accurate it does succeed in highlighting the fact that in order to understand the play, we have to see Lear and the other characters as being in some sense human (or persons), in situations that are within our form of life. Lear is not a tragic hero in the classical sense, doomed by fate or "some over-riding classical passion"; rather, he is a *man*, who chooses his fate, who brings down tragedy upon himself.

Our "philistine" is likely to be extremely dissatisfied with all this. He will protest that Lear is obviously *not* a man, that he is *fictional* -- the product of someone's mind, who if he exists at all, only exists on paper. There is no question of him having or making choices; his fate, which is

as fictional as he is, is decided along with everything else about him by his creator. Just as the sceptic in the traditional problem of other minds was correct in his insistence that we cannot *know* of the existence of other persons, the philistine is of course quite right about all this. Lear simply *is* fictional, and we are not. In certain ways, we are clearly separated from fictional characters: we do inhabit different worlds, and there is nothing we can do to eliminate this separation. As Walton says:

> From our position in the real world we cannot, it seems, rescue Robinson Crusoe from his island, or send flowers to Tom Sawyer's relatives grieving at his funeral. Willy Loman cannot tell us his troubles, nor can we give him advice. A Frankenstein monster may threaten with destruction any character who has the misfortune of sharing its world, but we in the real world are perfectly safe from it. '[25]

However, like the sceptic, the philistine goes wrong in concentrating exclusively on the separation between us -- in this case, on the fictionality of characters. In doing so, he fails to recognise that there is also kinship between us. We must now turn to a consideration of the nature of that kinship.

As I indicated earlier in this chapter, Cavell suggests that the kinship that exists between human beings is a function of our shared (human) form of life, which is structured by what Wittgenstein calls agreement in judgments. We are internally related, Cavell suggests, through "our mutual attunement or agreement in criteria". My

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[25] "How Remote Are Fictional Worlds From The Real World?", p.12.

suggestion here is that this relationship also exists between human beings and fictional characters; that is, that our kinship with fictional characters is of the same kind as our kinship with other minds. That this is so is apparent from what has already been said about language and criteria. Language as a whole, including the language of fiction, is governed or structured by our criteria, which is to say that it is a function of the human form of life. The concepts used in fiction, the situations and contexts in which they are put to work, and the characters who use them are therefore necessarily of or within the human form of life. The situations and fates of fictional characters are the kinds of situations that only members of our form of life can go through, and they are the kinds of situations that we all *do* go through. Lear, for example, has a uniquely human choice: he can either accept or reject the love that he is offered, he can respond to Cordelia in kind, or he can "avoid" her in the way that his other daughters avoid him. He chooses to reject love, to deny another and thus himself. Our kinship with him consists in that this is a choice which is open to us all, and which we are continually faced with. We can see that his "tragic flaw" lies in nothing more and nothing less than his denial of his kinship with others, his rejection of community, and this is a flaw to which only members of the human form of life are subject.

As in the case of other minds, the affirmation of kinship with characters is also an acceptance of our

separation. We acknowledge fictional characters in part by accepting this separation -- they *are* fictional. However, there is also kinship between us -- they are of our form of life. To acknowledge characters is to recognise that in spite of the "distance" between us, they are in a deep sense like ourselves, and that their situations are like our situations. Thus their fictionality, though not eliminated, can be overcome. Certainly Lear is fictional, but he is a fictional *human*, a fictional member of the human form of life.

I have argued here that Cavell's notion of acknowledgment provides us with the resources for understanding how it is that we recognise the characters and situations depicted in works of fiction as being both fictional and of our form of life. We are now in a position to see how Cavell's notion supports my account of how it is that we learn from fiction against the philistine's claim that characters such as Bilbo Baggins and the Cyclops are obviously not human; that we *know* that the characters and events of fiction are fictional and thus have a different ontological and metaphysical status from us. I have argued that such characters are necessarily of or within the human form of life because their (albeit fictional) existence is governed by and is a function of human criteria. The philistine's claim poses no threat to the theory that we learn from fiction by seeing there concepts in use in human situations once it is realised that we can and do

acknowledge these situations as being of the human form of life.

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the concept of acknowledgment might help us to resolve the puzzle concerning the possibility of our having genuine emotions in response to fiction outlined in Chapter I. This puzzle was generated by the fact that the theory of emotion that we have been dealing with in this thesis holds that at least two belief conditions must be satisfied for the ascription of a genuine emotion. Pitcher terms these the "General" belief, in the existence of the object of the emotion, and the "Specificatory" belief, that the object has certain properties'[26]. In the case of fiction, however, it is argued that we do not believe in the existence of the objects of our supposed emotions, and therefore cannot believe that they have any properties. Faced with this puzzle over the intuition that we can be moved by fictions, Colin Radford says:

> I am left with the conclusion that our being moved in certain ways by works of art, though very "natural" to us and in that way only too intelligible, involves us in inconsistency and so incoherence.'[27]

Kendall Walton, on the other hand, responds to the puzzle by arguing that the feelings we have in response to fictions cannot be genuine emotions, but are rather "quasi" or "make-believe" emotions. My suggestion here is that in the case of fictions, acknowledgment can play the role that

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'[26] Pitcher, pp.332-335.
'[27] Radford, p.78.

belief conditions play in the experience of emotions with real objects. If successful, making this move would allow us to avoid both Radford's and Walton's unpalatable conclusions.

My argument for the plausibility of this suggestion is based on the notion that belief, whilst a necessary condition for the experience of genuine emotions, is not in itself a sufficient cause of emotion. For example, let us take a case in which I am afraid of a bear. According to our theory of emotion, for it to be true that I am afraid I must believe firstly that the bear exists and secondly that it is dangerous or poses a threat to me. It seems clear, however, that these beliefs are not in themselves sufficient to generate my fear; it is perfectly possible that I should hold them and not be afraid. The element that is lacking here might be characterised in terms of "personal implication".

To give a precise characterisation of this notion would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for what it involves will presumably differ from case to case and person to person. Loosely, however, we can say that it is an acceptance that one is in some way directly or personally involved in the state of affairs in which the emotion is experienced. For example, let us say that I am angry with Smith; the relevant specificatory belief in this case might be that he has stolen some money. It is not simply this belief, however, that generates my anger. What does that

might be something such as my realisation that he has stolen *my* money, or the money of a friend of mine. Alternatively, it may be that I regarded him as a friend and feel that his theft (from anyone) is a betrayal of that friendship; or that I regard membership in society as involving contractual obligations to one's fellows, and consider anyone who steals from others to be failing to fulfill those obligations. The notion of personal implication or involvement in the state of affairs or context in which an emotion is aroused is an essential element in our emotional experience. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, such a notion is at the heart of the concept of acknowledgment. In acknowledging, we "involve" the other (be he fictional or real) in us; acknowledgment requires the realisation and acceptance of something about oneself as much as about the other -- namely, that one is both an individual and a member of a community, that one is both separate from others and internally related to them, that the humanity of the individual depends upon that of the community -- above all, that one is inextricably implicated in what I have been referring to as the human form of life.

I have argued here, then, that in addition to General and Specificatory beliefs, acknowledgment (or something that bears a close resemblance to it) plays a crucial role in our experience of emotions in the "real world". It is my suggestion that in the case of our response to fiction, acknowledgment of characters (the recognition that they are

fictional members of the human form of life) serves as a substitute for the General belief condition (the belief in the existence of the object of the emotion), and thus establishes the possibility of our having genuine emotions the objects of which are fictional. It should be noticed here that this move does not entirely eliminate the role played by belief in emotional response. In acknowledging Lear as a fictional member of the human form of life, we acknowledge certain things about him. We are informed about some of these things by Shakespeare: that he is King of England, that he has three daughters, that he employs a Fool, and so on. Others we have to discover and decide for ourselves, as we do in any relationship: Is Lear wise or foolish? Does he over- or under-estimate the nature of his relationship with Cordelia at the beginning of the play? Is he over-generous or simply irresponsible? As in any relationship, we may be certain about some of these things, and never sure about others. The important point for our purposes here is that in acknowledging characters we accept that they have (in some sense) certain properties. These properties, I suggest, form the basis of specificatory beliefs about the characters in question, which can be true or false, and which play essentially the same role in our emotional response to fiction that they do with regard to fictions whose objects are real: they determine the nature of the emotion -- whether it will be pity or scorn, for example -- and they allow us to judge whether it is

reasonable or not'[28].

My suggestion here has been that by substituting acknowledgment for the General belief we can establish the possibility of experiencing genuine emotions, determined by specificatory beliefs, whose objects are fictional. Although I claim that these emotions should (and through the introduction of acknowledgment can) be seen as being genuine, I would emphasise that I do not wish to deny that there is an important distinction to be drawn between them and other emotions. This distinction, which is what Walton tries to capture in his notion of "quasi-emotions", lies in the difference in ontological status of fictional objects and actual objects. An investigation into these differences would require a thesis other than this; I would make one point about it here, however. By emphasising the distinction between emotions with fictional objects and other emotions, we run the risk of loosing sight of other, perhaps equally important, distinctions. One such might be a distinction between emotions whose objects are members of the human form of life (which on my account would include both fictional characters and human beings) and those whose objects are not (objects such as bears and avalanches and so on). It seems likely that an investigation into these kinds of differences and distinctions will have to be made through analyses of the ways in which particular emotions work in particular circumstances'[29]. One of the ways in which we conduct such

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'[28] See Pitcher, pp.339-340.
'[29] Pitcher, for instance, acknowledges the need for this

investigations, I have argued, is through writing, reading, and watching works of fiction.

In this chapter, I have argued that with the introduction of Cavell's notion of acknowledgment, further support is given to my account of how it is that we learn from fiction. I have also suggested that this notion provides us with the resources with which to understand how we can have emotions the objects of which are fictional characters. We are now in a position to complete our account of catharsis and emotion in fiction.

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[23](cont'd) kind of inquiry. See pp.336-337, and his brief analysis of "love", pp.340-341.

VI. Conclusions

> The immense controversy, carried on in books, pamphlets, sheets, and flying articles, mostly in German, as to what Aristotle really meant by the famous words in the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, about tragedy accomplishing the purification of our moods of pity and sympathetic fear, is one of the disgraces of human intelligence, a grotesque monument of sterility.'[130]

The problem concerning catharsis that we have been considering in this thesis was generated as follows. If one accepts what Walton calls the "common-sense" theory of emotion advocated by Bedford and Pitcher, one is forced to accept the (counter-intuitive) conclusion that we cannot have genuine emotions whose objects are fictional; that is, that we cannot be genuinely moved by fictions. Traditionally, however, catharsis has been conceived of as signifying a process that is essentially concerned with art and the emotions. The theory which has dominated thought on the subject for centuries argues that the cathartic process is one through which emotions are aroused by a work, and then purged, leaving the subject in a state of emotional balance or harmony. It would appear, then, that a consequence of denying the possibility of genuine emotion in response to fictions is that one has to reject the concept

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'[130] John Morley, *Diderot*.

of catharsis as an unworkable notion, based on a mistaken theory of emotion.

However, although he accepts the "common-sense" theory of emotion as being essentially correct, this consequence is not accepted by Walton, who suggests that cathartic effect accounts for much of the reason why we find fiction valuable and important. Walton's implicit suggestion is that an account of catharsis can be given which need not violate the constraints imposed by our theory of emotion. My aim in this thesis has been to give such an account.

The purgation theory of catharsis depends on the idea that art can arouse genuine emotions in us. In Chapter II I argued that even if the objects of these emotions are taken to be universals of some kind, rather than fictions, this theory is inconsistent with our theory of emotion, and therefore could not be a candidate for the account of catharsis that we have been trying to give here. Leon Golden's clarification theory of catharsis appeared to be a more promising candidate. The attraction of this theory lies in the fact that it makes catharsis an intellectual process, concerned with our learning about, rather than directly experiencing, emotions. Nothing in the theory depends on the idea that art can arouse genuine emotion in us, and it therefore avoids violating the constraints imposed by our theory of emotion. Golden's theory, however, is limited in as much as his concern is simply to make the concept of catharsis intelligible within the context of the *Poetics*. As

such, his account is dependent upon and limited to specifically Aristotelian conceptions of art and learning.

In Chapter IV, I gave an account of how it is that we learn from fiction that goes beyond these concerns. This account is based on the Wittgensteinian notion that we learn the meaning of concepts, the criteria which govern their application, by seeing them in use in particular contexts and circumstances. My suggestion was that fiction provides us with extended examples of concepts in use, and thus that works of fiction can be seen as a series of Wittgensteinian "grammatical investigations" into the criteria which structure language as a whole and govern our use of particular concepts. It followed from the Wittgensteinian notion of criteria which forms the basis of this account that in order to understand these grammatical investigations, we have to be able to understand the characters and situations depicted in fiction as being in some sense "human", or of the human form of life. The mechanism of this identification, I suggested, is given by Stanley Cavell's notion of acknowledgment. To acknowledge fictions is to overcome our separation from them, the fact that they are fictional and we are not, by affirming what Cavell calls the "kinship" between us. This kinship is a function of the fact that the criteria which govern their existence are the same criteria that structure ours. To acknowledge a fictional character, then, is to recognise that he is a member of the human form of life in spite of

his fictionality.

When applied to fiction as I have applied it, the concept of acknowledgment has much in common with Walton's notions of playing games of "make-believe" and "becoming fictional". It should be noticed that acknowledgment does satisfy the basic condition for something's being a game of make-believe. All that is needed for such a game to be in effect, Walton tells us, is that someone imagines or decides something to be the case'[3]'. For instance, when a child plays a game of mud-pies, all he need do in order to qualify as playing the game is decide that a certain glob of mud is going to be a pie. He may or may not then go on to do things such as "put the pie in the oven", or "serve it to his friends". The decision, or act of imagination, that the glob of mud is to be a pie is, I suggest, analogous to acknowledging that something is the case. As Cavell says, whether or not we acknowledge another is no more and no less than a choice; the act of acknowledgment represents a decision on our part to recognise that something is the case. Walton argues that by playing games of make-believe using works of fiction as props, we become fictional; that is, we become a part of what we might call a form of life which includes both us and the work. Similarly, I have argued in Chapter V that in acknowledging fictions we recognise our involvement or implication in their form of life; we recognise it as our own. As Cavell says, "we

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'[3]' See Chapter I above, pp.14-16.

involve [the work] in us"[132].

The account of catharsis that I have offered in this thesis, then, suggests that the concept denotes an intellectual process through which we are able to learn about the criteria which govern our use of emotion concepts, or the language of emotion, and through expanding our knowledge of criteria, learn more about the human form of life itself'[133]. The idea that learning plays a central role in our response to fiction is also implicit in Kendall Walton's theory of fiction. In "Fearing Fictions", he argues that games of make-believe have a cathartic effect on their participants:

> such activities serve to clarify one's feelings, help one to work out conflicts, provide an outlet for the expression of repressed or socially unacceptable feelings, prepare one emotionally for possible future crises by providing "practice" in facing imaginary crises. '[134]

It is because of this effect, he argues, that we find such games valuable and important, and that we use them in education. However, Walton stops short of explaining what is involved in this effect:

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[132] Cavell, *The World Viewed*, (Harvard University Press, 1979 ed.); p.154.

[133] It may be pointed out here that nothing in my account restricts what we learn from fiction to the concepts and criteria of emotion and feeling. However, it can plausibly be argued, I think, that much fiction, and in particular those works which we think of as "great literature", is concerned primarily with human emotion and feeling, and thus that much of what we learn from it will have to do with these concepts and the criteria which govern them. Nothing important hangs on whether or not the term catharsis is restricted to learning about these kinds of things in particular.

[134] "Fearing Fictions", p.24.

> I will not venture an explanation of how such therapeutic techniques are effective, nor of why simulation games work. But whatever explanation is appropriate will, I suspect, go a long way toward explaining why we are as interested in works of fiction as we are, and clarifying what we get from them.'[135]

My explanation of how games of make-believe produce their effect, of why they work, turns on the idea that through them we can learn about our criteria, and thus the human form of life itself. This explanation, it should be noticed, also captures Walton's sense that the cathartic effect of works of fiction enables the "game-player" to "discover" or "come to terms with his actual feelings". As I indicated in Chapter IV, it is because we possess Wittgensteinian criteria that we are able to know or say anything about concepts at all. Knowledge of public criteria is what makes it possible to identify and distinguish our own emotions.

> We feel as if we had to *penetrate* phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the "*possibilities*" of phenomena. We remind ourselves, that is to say, of the *kind of statement* that we make about phenomena... Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. '[136]

Wittgenstein says: "You learned the *concept* 'pain' when you learned language"[137]. The point here is that we learn what the public phenomena of pain *is* when we acquire criteria. As Cavell says: "To know how to use the word 'anger' is to know what *anger* is"[138]. In giving us a chance to extend our

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[135] "Fearing Fictions", p.25.
[136] *P.I.*, §90.
[137] *P.I.*, §384.
[138] *CR*, p.185.

knowledge of the criteria of emotion concepts, then, works of fiction also allow us to "come to terms with", "discover", and "learn to accept" our *own* emotions. It should be noticed that this account of the cathartic process as being one of learning about emotion through seeing emotion concepts in use is also consistent with the idea that we learn about emotion through observation of human action in public contexts rather than through introspection, which as we noted earlier is a central tenet of the "common-sense" theory of emotion that we have been working with in this thesis.

However, as we saw in Chapter V, my account of catharsis also allows for the possibility of our having genuine emotions the objects of which are fictional. It might be objected that this feature of the account violates the constraints imposed by our "common-sense" theory of emotion, and that in doing so it fails to satisfy the aims set out at the end of Chapter I. However, by substituting acknowledgment for the belief in the existence of the object of the emotion in the case of our response to fiction, my account does not violate or conflict with our theory of emotion; rather, it extends its application to an area in which it at first seemed that either the theory itself would have to be rejected or that we would be forced to dismiss the intuition that we can be genuinely moved by fiction. In extending the theory of emotion and allowing for the possibility that we can have emotions whose objects are

fictional, my account allows us to reject both of these uncomfortable options, and thus succeeds in capturing traditional intuitions about the nature of our response to fiction. As we noted in Chapter I, it is precisely these intuitions that Walton attempts to account for in "Fearing Fictions" with his introduction of the notion of "quasi-emotions"[13]. Quasi-emotions are introduced into his account because he has to deny the possibility that we can have genuine emotions with fictional objects. In introducing the notion, however, Walton is faced with the question of why these unreal emotions are so similar to real emotions; so similar that people have been mistaking them for real emotions for centuries:

> One can't help wondering why Charles' realisation that make-believedly he is in danger produces quasi-fear in him, why it brings about a state similar to real fear, even though he knows he is not really in danger.'[14]

My account allows us to answer this question by asserting that quasi-emotions *are* states similar to real emotions, that they are just as "genuine". Walton is right, however, in wishing to give a special status to emotions whose objects are fictional, for they are importantly different from other emotions. This difference lies precisely in that their objects are fictional, and it is a difference that needs to be marked. As the account I have given here indicates, however, it is not a difference between real and unreal emotions.

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[13] See "Fearing Fictions", pp12-14.
[14] "Fearing Fictions", p.14 n.10.

In this thesis, I have characterised catharsis as a learning process through which we increase our "emotional experience" and extend our knowledge of the human form of life by seeing emotion concepts and the criteria which govern them in use in particular fictional contexts and circumstances. As I indicated in Chapter IV, however, the actual having of emotions is also a central, though not the sole, element in emotional experience. Therefore, as the traditional purgation theorists realised, a theory of catharsis should be able to accomodate the possibility that art can arouse genuine emotions whose objects are fictional in us. Unlike Walton's, the account of catharsis that I have given here succeeds in doing so. However, it should be emphasised that the possibility of being genuinely moved by fiction plays only a minor role in the overall theory of catharsis given in this thesis. A work may or may not arouse emotion in us, depending on such factors as its quality, how many times we have seen or read it, our psychological state at the time, and so on.

I have suggested here that we can *learn* from fiction, however, whether or not we are moved to emotion by it, and that it is this learning process that is denoted by the concept of catharsis. In this thesis I have argued that a crucial aspect of the way in which we learn from fiction is by understanding it as a series of grammatical investigations into the criteria which govern our use of concepts and language as a whole; by seeing in fiction

concepts in use in particular contexts and circumstances. I do not claim that this is the only way in which we can lean from fiction, however. For instance, given that my account allows for the possibility of experiencing genuine emotions the objects of which are fictional, it might plausibly be argued that we can learn about the emotions we experience in everyday life (that is, emotions whose objects are believed to be real) by experiencing emotions the objects of which we know to be fictional'[41]. This and other suggestions concerning the way in which we learn from fiction remain open for investigation; the account I have given in this thesis should be seen as an attempt to open up, rather than to close off, such avenues of enquiry.

'[41]' This kind of idea plays an important role in traditional theories of catharsis; see Chapter II above. Cf. Walton, "Fearing Fictions", p.24, and Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love", p.332.

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